WORLD | A10
Saddam claims he was beaten in US custody

LIFESTYLE
Survey of top toys on most big boys' Christmas wish list

BUSINESS/BI
Energy department to lead Malampaya oil project

ENTERTAINMENT
Stars' wishes: World peace, housebroken puppies, etc.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

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Recall of EO creating energy superbody urged

By Philip C. Tubeza and Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

A STRONG ALLY OF PRESIDENT MACAPAGAL-ARROYO yesterday urged her to recall an order creating an oil and energy superbody that will assume practically all the functions of energy Secretary Raphael Lotilla.

Mayor's face glows on Christmas lanterns

By Nancy C. Carvajal

MAYOR JEJOMAR BINAY of Makati "illuminated" The Inquirer Editorial Mayor Jejomar Binay's portrait on Christmas lanterns hanging from

Ramos warns GMA on no-election plan

Threatens to pull out support for President

By Cynthia D. Balana

FORMER PRESIDENT Fidel V. Ramos yesterday rejected as a "monumental blunder" a proposal to scrap elections in 2007 and threatened to withdraw support from President Macapagal-Arroyo unless she declared by New Year's Day that she opposed the move.

"I am say that my support is waning right now," Ramos said in a curiously informal interview with ABC, reacting to the reconciliation last week by the 23-member Constitutional Commission to get rid of the upcoming balloting for local offices, Congress and half of the Senate, extend the term of incumbents of those and pave the way for parliamentary elections in 2010.

The former military chief's declaration of support of Mr Arroyo in July was regarded as a key factor that saved her administration from collapse in the midst of mounting calls for her resignation. She followed resolutions in the "Hello Garci" wiretaps that suggested she stole last year's election.

The 77 year old Ramos said he had no problem with the parliamentary system proposed by the 12-member commission headed by Bb Atienza to help wean politicians from reliance in the midst of mounting calls for her resignation. She followed resolutions in the "Hello Garci" wiretaps that suggested she stole last year's election.

The 77 year old Ramos said he had no problem with the parliamentary system proposed by the 12-member commission headed by Bb Atienza to wean politicians from reliance on the Constitution to replace the presidential system.

"That's the first basic step that must be taken. But on the no election, I consider that a monumental blunder," he said.

"I'm not giving her a deadline or ultimatum," Ramos said of his

TWO DAYS BEFORE CHRISTMAS DAY

XMAS STUDDED. It's a season of great joy and anticipation for the children of a Christmas tapestry seller on Roxas Boulevard.

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS. A "balikbayan" family arrives at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport looking runs the worst for wear.

ROYAL PDOGHES. These are no ordinary mutts, they're St. Bernards dressed as Three Kings during a Christmas dog show in Baguio City.

SC to veer away from policy of intervention

By Artemio M. Mesum

NEWLY APPOINTED CHIEF JUSTICE Artemio Panganiban yesterday vowed to steer the Supreme Court away from the controversial "intervention" policy of his predecessor and defer to the government the resolution of issues involving business and politics.

"When there is a doubt as to whether the judiciary should intervene with actions and policies of the political departments of the government or matters involving the prosperity of the people, I will defer to the judgment of the political branches," Panganiban said.

Panganiban spoke at a news conference a day after he was sworn into office as the country's head magistrate following the retirement of Chief Justice Hilario Davide Jr. on Tuesday at the age of 70.

Panganiban's view represents a break from the Davide court, which had been criticized for taking head on questions involving government contracts, finance and economics.

A former poor yesterday who rose to the top of the judiciary, Panganiban promised "to safe-

GMA donated to Veritas, says Rosales

By Christian V. Esguerra

MANILA ARCHBISHOP EMERITO Nicolas yesterday said President Macapagal-Arroyo's controversial P1 million donation did not go to his "Words of Hope" project to help the poor but to the Church-owned Radio Veritas.

Nicolas made the clarification in an apparent effort to clear his name over the donation controversy which has come to the fore recently and was Mrs Arroyo's way of countering his support amid demands for her resignation over charges she stole last year's elections.

"She did not give anything to Words, certainly not to me," he told reporters over lunch.

He said the amount was given to Fr. Anton Pascual, executive director of the Radio-TV Pinoy broadcasting line.

Nicolas broke his silence nearly a month after the incident re-

'Silahis ng Pasko' makes kids gay

By Vincent Cabreza
PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

BAGUIO CITY—EVERY CHRISTMAS SEASON, "Silahis ng Pasko" literally makes Baguio's impoverished children happy and gay.

And it has nothing to do with the so-called fried sex, despite the unfortunate coinciding that has come to be attached to the word. ("Silahis" is Filipino slang for lesbian/gay.)

This American-built city has hosted to love the 32-year-old Christmas charity program, as much as the other charity programs conceptualized by Marcos Padilla, Baguio's self-proclaimed Santa Claus.

Padilla, 74, is an unacknowledged eccentric whose outlandish projects often draw ridicule despite the fact that they cheer up the summer capital's underprivileged.

Silahis ng Pasko, for example, produces clean watches for the blind and parlor games for the elderly. It has also provided cash prizes and trophies to children born on Christmas Day.

But it is only one notch on Padilla's belt.

He has also come up with a "lucky for eight visitor" program, which offers select foreign tourists free lodging in a hotel, as well as dinner and a tour of the city. (But program is low-key compared to the "lucky summer visitor" project of the Baguio Correspondents and Broadcasters Club during Holy Week.)

Padilla recently started a venture in Pangasinan province to bring electricity to barrios without power.

P42-B DEBT TO NAPOCOR

Meralco assailed for pass-on bid

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

A SEC CONSUMER GROUP PETITIONED yesterday said Manila Electric Co., not its 4 million household and business customers is to franchise area, should pay the P42 billion it allegedly owes state-owned National Power Corp. in connection with a coastal 1.8-year power supply agreement.

Pete L. Bagatsing, president of the National Association of Electricity Consumers for Reform Inc. (Nascore), asked as the Lopez-owned Meralco for saying that it would simply pass on the cost of paying off its obligations to Napocor by charging consumers higher electricity rates.

In an interview, Dagan said Meralco was trying to veil over its consumers's role in the raging controversy between the private distribution utility and the state-owned power-generating firm.

They are misleading the public. The P42 billion is considered a penalty that should be borne solely by Meralco and not by its customers who were never party to the contract signed in 1994," said Dagan, who has represented consumer interests in hearings at the Energy Regulatory Commission.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita on Wednesday confirmed that Malacañang was considering a government takeover of Meralco by nationalizing the ailing P42 billion that the utility allegedly owed Napocor. Another option being considered by the government is the liquidation of the P42 billion to stakeholders through annual payments of P14 billion by Meralco for three years.

Also on Wednesday Department president Cyril del Callar confirmed that Napocor's Binga with the Commission on state-owned firm (P42 billion). Napocor's claim stemmed from a supply contract with Meralco from 1996 to 2009. The deal required Meralco to buy a minimum volume of electricity

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2005
Second FRONTPAGE

WEATHER FORECAST

NPA rebs: No Christmas truce

LUCENA CITY—THE NEW PEOPLE'S ARMY rebels will not observe a Christmas ceasefire with government forces this year, rebel spokesperson Gregorio "Ka Roger" Rosal announced Thursday midnight.

In a radio phone text message in Filipino, Rosal said offside of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the NPA, in military wing, saw no reason to declare a truce this Christmas and New Year's Day in the midst of recent spate of attacks by the military and "other US-Arroyo sanctioned armed groups" against insurgent civilians.

Rosal cited the government's "insensitivity" to the peace talks as another reason for their non-observance of the Christmas ceasefire.

"The non-observance of the ceasefire this year was in response to the intense and widespread call of the people for the NPA to continue to inflict serious blows against the brutal US-Arroyo regime to hasten its downfall," Rosal said.

Rosal said about 118 leftist activists, including journalists and human rights lawyers, had been killed since March this year. Four members of a non-governmental organization in Central Luzon were added to the list last week.

1st since 2000

Rosal said the last time communists did not declare a Christmas truce was in 2000, when then President Joseph Estrada suspended the peace talks and ordered an all-out war against the rebels.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines has said it wants a shorter-than-usual truce with the 8,000-member NPA over the holidays due to concerns about increased violence in the countryside. It has recommended a two-day Christmas and New Year unilateral ceasefire, which Malacañang said might likely be approved by President Arroyo.

Since 1986, the government has declared a holiday ceasefire with communist and Muslim rebels as the mainly Roman Catholic country marks one of the longest yuletide seasons in the world.

The Christmas season here, celebrated with family reunions and parties, starts with dawn Misas on Dec. 16 and ends on the feast of Epiphany on Jan. 6.

In Manila, Director Vidal Quesol, chief of the National Capital Region Police Office, said the police were prepared to defend cities against possible rebel attacks.

"We will not allow these communists and their lackeys [to] mind the joy and climax of Christmas," said Quesol.

For his part Philippine National Police Deputy Director General Avelino Razon Jr. said, "[The re-action of a group] shows bad faith on the part of the CPP/NPA. They themselves do not want peace during Christmas," said Razon.

The NPA, active in 69 of 71 provinces, usually limits attacks to the countryside, targeting officials it deems to be corrupt and businessmen which refuse to pay "revolutionary war taxes."

More than 40,000 people have been killed in the insurgency since the late 1960s, soaring to centers and shutting rural development in one of Southeast Asia's poorest countries.

Peace negotiations with the communist rebels, brokered by Norway, has been stalled since August 2004 when Manila declined to help persuade the United States from dropping the rebel movement from its terror blacklist. Jeffrey E. Skelker in Quezon & Aries Arugay, Jaime del Puerto and Reuters

Rains to ease up Christmas weekend

By Norman Bordadora

IT WON'T BE ALL SUNSHINE this Christmas weekend, but there would be enough of a break from the past week's heavy rains to conduct disaster relief and rehabilitation efforts in Occidental Mindoro and northern Palawan.

Gerardano Tomol Jr., Officer in Charge of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa), reported to Malacañang and the Philippine Disaster Coordination Council officials that based on the latest developments monitored by weather satellite, that it would be advisable to take advantage of the expected break from the rains.

"[It may afford sufferers of] how more to step up disaster relief and rehabilitation efforts in areas severely affected by the widespread flooding and landslides caused by a combination of the tail end of tropical depression Quedan, the tail end of the southwest and the inter-tropical convergence zone," Tomol said.

Occidental Mindoro and Palawan would continue to experience cloudy and dreary weather this Christmas weekend but Pa-gasa weather branch chief Nathaniel Cruz told the Inquirer that the amount of rainfall would be less making relief efforts possible.

"It will not be raindrop but there will be less rain and will make relief efforts possible," Cruz said.

In a news release, Pagasa said that northern and central Luzon, and Metro Manila would be experiencing good weather conditions over the holiday weekend. However, the Visayas and Mindanao, particularly their eastern portions, would have rainy weather.

Pagasa scientists issued the weather outlook for today until Dec. 26.

According to the Manila weather, Laoag City Tuguegarao, Baguio City, Manila, Subic, Tagaytay City and Legazpi City will have partly cloudy to cloudy skies while weather with rain showers or Christmas Day.

Those areas will have more or less the same weather today and tomorrow except for Tuguegarao and Legazpi which are expected to have more rains today. On Sunday, Christmas Day, the rain is expected to abate but there will be some cloudy skies and rain over those areas in Luzon.

Puerto Princesa City, Iloilo City, Cebu, Tacloban, Cagayan de Oro, Davao and Zamboanga City are expected to have cloudy weather with rain showers and thunderstorms today until Dec. 26, according to the weather bulletin issued at 5 a.m. yesterday.

"Pagasa is providing the special weather outlook to guide the public in their travel plans, especially since the exodus of holiday vacationers to their home provinces are expected as peak during the Christmas season," Pagasa said in its news release.

FLOODING in Calapan, Oriental Mindoro

GMA appeals for help for flood victims

By Christine O. Avendaño

PRESIDENT MACAPAGAL-ARROYO yesterday asked people to spread some Christmas cheer by helping victims of the flood-devastated provinces of Palawan and Mindoro.

"I am appealing to all of you to share your Christmas by giving to the typhoon and flood victims," Ms Arroyo said in a speech before residents of Sarangani Magpangga in Pasay, during a "Yuletide Christmas."

The President said Mindoro Oriental had been spared from the devastation of the typhoons which hit Mindoro and Palawan.

She said the typhoon destroyed many bridges, leaving several areas underwater, isolating many barangays and making it harder for authorities to reach flood victims.

But now that the rains had stopped, the President said "Our Air Force will continue air drops by helicopter as relief goods can reach them."

She thanked media outlets for launching separate campaigns to gather relief goods and contributions for flood victims.

Ms Arroyo asked people to send their contributions and relief goods to media outlets, the Department of Social Welfare and Development and the National Disaster Coordinating Council in Camp Aguinaldo in Quezon City.

She also announced that the wheels of Pasaway had now access to wrist.

Pending water to all barangay in Metro Manila was part of her 10-point program, she said.

And now that the residents had adequate water supply the President wished Santa Mercy Christmas and asked them to help the victims of "too much water" in Mindoro and Palawan.

Honest airport porter returns ₱255,000

By Nikko Dizon

A BAGGAGE PORTER RECENTLY another symbol of honesty as the country's premier international airport after he returned his Tuesday a clutch bag containing money amounting to an estimated ₱255,000 in cash.

Joel Ramirez, 35, was retrieving used baggage carts from the parking lot of the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (Naia) Terminal 2 when he saw a small brown bag left in one of the carts.

The bag contained ₱171,000 ($258,000), 35,000, a plane ticket, and a Japanese passport under the name of Takaaki Yamada, among other things.

Ramirez immediately turned over the bag to his supervisor and also informed the airport police of his discovery.

Lt. Leonard Longjas, officer in charge of the Naia 2 airport police, together with chief officer Sgt. Ophelio Mendez, interviewed the incident and discovered that Yamada was a passenger on Philippine Airlines (PAL) flight PR 431 from Tokyo that arrived at 1:30 p.m. at the Naia.

The airport police called the Japanese Embassy to ask for assistance in locating Yamada.

The embassy was able to trace Yamada through a number found in the bag, and at around 7 p.m. the same day, the Japanese tourist was able to claim his money, valuables, and important documents.

This year, the Naia has announced several acts of honesty from several employees, as well as a jail driver who ply the airport area.

They all received sizeable amounts of money that they found unattended inside the cab, in the airport viewing area beside an aircraft.

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Joint venture on Naia 3 proposed

By Michael Lim Ubac

ADMINISTRATION lawmakers yesterday suggested to Malacañang to explore the viability of a joint venture agreement with the Philippine International Air Terminals Co. (Piatco) to operate Terminal 3 of the Ninoy Aquino International Airport.

Surigao del Sur Rep. Prospero Pichay Jr., vice chair of the Commission on Appointments, and Manila Rep. Ernesto "Bansai" Nieva, chair of the House committee on people's participation, said the airport facility had been a "white elephant" for quite some time now.

"Government certainly does not want it to become a monument of waste and lost opportunities," said Pichay who called on the government to finally comply with the Supreme Court ruling Tuesday which allowed government to take legal possession of Terminal 3 once it had paid the minimum P3 billion to Piatco.

World class

"The government stands to lose nothing in a joint venture because it will finally be able to operate a world class terminal while not immediately shelling out the P3 billion initial compensation to Piatco. It will also expedite the opening of the world class terminal early next year," said Pichay.

He said a joint venture would also be "advantageous" to Piatco because it would continue to be a stakeholder of Naia 3 until the government was able to fully comply with the compensation.

Nieva, for his part, supported Pichay's proposal for government to strike a most reasonable compromise agreement with Piatco to allow the Terminal 3 opening early next year.

"While we support an opening of Terminal 3 at the soonest possible time, this must be done without the government disregarding its obligations to Piatco as determined by our Supreme Court. The court's decision provided the legal basis for government possession of Naia Terminal 3. Government should take this opportunity to immediately negotiate with Piatco on the payment scheme," said Nieva.

Just and prompt

Pichay said Solicitor General Alfredo Benipayo should not stand in the way of a "just and prompt" resolution of the controversial project.

While Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita said Wednesday that "our policy group might opt to pay the (amount) immediately, since the money is already there," Benipayo warned that the Arroyo administration could lose heavily if it paid up before taking over the terminal.

Pichay urged the government to start negotiating with Piatco to come up with a "win-win" agreement for Terminal 3 operations.

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Yap back in GMA Cabinet

By Christine O. Avendaño and Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

PRESIDENT MACAPAGAL-ARROYO appears to be on hiring mode, with new personality countermand appointments both off the barrel.

Former Agriculture Secretary Arthur Yap, who has been cleared of tax evasion charges, is back in the Cabinet and holding yet another position once held by Luis "Cito" Lorenzo.

Yap's appointment papers as presidential adviser for job creation, which Ms Arroyo signed on Dec. 16, was released yesterday.

Also yesterday, Ms Arroyo swore in Buenaventura Angeles Jr. and Napoleon Morrison as the new commissioners of the Bureau of Customs. But Interior Secretary Angelo Reyes, one of her staunchest allies, is not too thrilled about it.

A statement issued by Malacañang said Mr Arroyo issued the Office of the Presidential Adviser for Job Creation—a position that holds the rank of Cabinet secretary—when she signed Executive Order No. 475 on Dec. 5.

The new office is expected to consolidate "the private proposals" on job generation and food security programs being implemented by various government agencies.

In July 2004, Ms Arroyo created the Office of the Presidential Adviser for Jobs Generation, and named Lorenzo as its head.

She abolished that office on March 1, and transferred its over-sight functions to the Presidential Management Staff.

Take 2

Interestingly, Yap, a former student of Ms Arroyo's, explains Lorenzo in his new post.

He has now replaced Lorenzo in two Cabinet positions—the first time when he took over the agriculture portfolio from the latter on July 9, 2004.

Yap was then chair of the National Food Authority before he became agriculture secretary. He quit the latter post on June 30 to face tax evasion charges.

The Bureau of Internal Revenue filed the charges against Yap and his father Dominador Yap for allegedly failing to pay P4 million in real estate taxes in 1997. Father and son were said to have bought a piece of real estate in Pasig City in 1997.

The BIR dismissed the tax evasion charges against the Yaps on Oct. 12.

GIC at Customs

Morales, who joined the BOC in 1968, yesterday took his oath as deputy customs commissioner. But he will also serve as officer in charge of customs in place of Alexander Arevalo.

Malacañang did not explain why Ms Arroyo did not appoint a permanent head of the BOC, one of the main revenue-collection agencies.

Morales was customs chief of Barangay Ayala Reyes, then head of the national Cash Force against smuggling and hijacking, accused him of smuggling.

Sources sources said Reyes openly opposed Morales' appointment as early as last month but that his protector left no chief man because the latter had the backing of top Palace officials.

Finance Secretary Margarito Teves said Morales obtained clearance from the Office of the Ombudsman before he was considered for the BOC post.

The others in the incoming were BOC lawyer Greg Chavez and former Akbayanista Cito Rep. Magtanggol Gunigundo.

Arevalo took over the BOC when businessman Alberto Lina joined the "Hyatt 10," a group of key government officials who resigned their posts on July 8 and rallied on Ms Arroyo to do the same.

A protégé of former President Fidel Ramos, Arevalo failed to meet the monthly collection target set by the Department of Finance.

No radical changes

In a statement issued by the BOC, Morales said he would not make radical changes to the bureau's system.

"There is no need for us now to declassify and create new laws and processes. The period for policymaking has long been done. We are now in the stage of doing things, of acting together and performing it right," he said.

Earlier, Morales headed the NGO's Valuation Reference Information System, which monitors the valuation and classification of imported goods, particularly motor vehicles. With a report from Anita R. Sarmiento

Ramos warns GMA on no-polls plan

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo chats with her top supporter, former President Fidel V. Ramos, after her 2005 State of the Nation Address.

call on Mr Arroyo to step by Jan. 1 her position on the proposed scrapping of the 2007 polling. "But the issues are so crucial that any further delay will bring us closer and closer to the brink of economic and political failure."

Speaker Jose de Venecia also distanced himself from the proposal to cancel the 2007 balloting as part of a transition in the parliamentary system. De Venecia yesterday said that he personally believed that lawmakers, as a general rule and as a matter of principle, "should not benefit from their actions."

'Congress has final say'

Mr Arroyo's political adviser, Gabriel Claudio, said in response to the Ramos statement that the consultative position on the 2007 balloting was simply a recommendation to Congress which would decide on the whole package of proposals to shift the country to the parliamentary system.

Claudio said that voting in the committee on the no-election proposal was dire—"perhaps a soft coup at that." He said he hoped that lawmakers would be able to make a "prudent and judicious discernment on the issue."

"We are confident that they will ignore not only the ultimate of the recommendations but also the circumstances, rationale and issues behind them," Claudio said.

Lawmakers, he said, would take into account "the propriety and public opinion factor and how a no-election scenario will strengthen or weaken the chances for the approval of the near submarine amendment proposals."

Only a transition mechanism

"The no-election proposal was probably only made as a transition mechanism for the attainment of that objective, the acceptability of which can still be subjected to wider examination," he added.

Reacting as well to Ramos' opinion, commission chair Jose Abueva merely reiterated that the no-election proposal was included in the Charter change proposals because it was the majority decision.

Abueva said the Consom recommendations were put forward for Congress to scrutinize and hopefully consider.

Ramos has repeatedly said that his support for the President was only incidental and conditional on her willingness to conduct her own and shift the burn of governance from presidential to parliamentary. In the ABC interview, he indicated that the 2007 elections would resolve the question of Ms Arroyo's legitimacy.

Ms Arroyo, 58, survived an impeachment attempt in the House in September over allegations she manipulated the May 2004 elections.

No meaningful reforms

Ramos said he was disappointed that the constitutional commission's report did not meet his expectations, particularly on his proposals to effect meaningful political and judicial reforms.

He said he had received rumors of the commission's discussions until Dec. 13 when the issues of no election and the extension of term limits had not yet cropped up.

"Let's wrestle all of the members of the Consom by working as hard. And if that's the majority position so be it," Ramos said.

"But in our favor is a supreme duty, the last 12 hours of the commission. The hasty endorsement to Congress is the results of a pre-cooked scenario...those provisions that had to do with keeping people in power without elections."

Ramos challenged the President to make public the final report of the commission.

He said he himself had opposed constitutional change pertaining to the reduction of the President and the lifting of term limits of elected officials when he was still president.

Beholden commission

Ramos also slammed Malacañang's creation of the commission whose members, he said, were appointed by the President and made them beholden to her.

"My proposal was a high commission of leaders, maybe seven to 11, who can experienced, tested, respected leaders of their respective sectors to work parallel with the constituent assembly assuming that the constituent assembly was constituted beforehand," he said.

Ramos also said he was not imposing his suggestions on the President but was merely stating his opinion as "a senior citizen who had been there."

On retired Gen. Fortunato Abat's arrest for opposing a transitional government to replace the Arroyo administration, Ramos said he respected his statements and former defense secretary.

But he said the Abat move was a "no-arm" solution to the present economic and political turmoil.

"On the other hand, we should expect his actions in terms of waking up people. In that sense, he's making himself a martyrdom which is the character of General Abat and his family, in that sense, he has done something but I don't know if that will succeed now to stir anyone to solve the nation's problems," he added.

With reports from Christine O. Avendaño, Michael Lim Ubac and Philip C. Tubeza

Correction

IN THE DEC. 16 ISSUE, an article and photo caption in the Tuesday-Business section on Page B1—"Ty, nation's first to take out market-ing's gain"—misnamed the name of the president of DBC Philippines as Lawrence...not Terrence...Hamilton.

* * *

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NBI men pay tribute to Wycoco

By Tina G. Santos

NBI EMPLOYEES line up to pay their last respects to NBI Director Reynaldo Wycoco whose body was transferred to the NBI headquarters in Manila. Wycoco will be buried at the Libingan ng mga Bayani tomorrow.
EDWIN BACASMAS

WHILE SOME EMPLOYEES HELD a Christmas party elsewhere, moans of grief rang out as the chestnut-colored casket bearing the remains of Director Reynaldo Wycoco arrived at the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) office yesterday.

Most employees took a time off from their work and lined up at the NBI grounds to welcome their boss, whose remains arrived at the bureau around 10:30 a.m. Officials, meanwhile, wore black armbands as a sign of their mourning.

They also took turns in holding vigil at the late director's wake.

Wycoco, a former police general and a graduate of the Philippine Military Academy (PMA), looked very much a gentleman in his military uniform. Wreaths from relatives and different government offices overflowed the NBI gymnasium.

"He was soft-spoken, he never got angry. He left a legacy of good leadership," said Romulo Asis, chief of the bureau's Anti-Human Trafficking Division.

Most of the employees said the late director was very supportive of measures initiated for their welfare.

"He was a good boss, we'll surely miss him," they said.

A military burial at the Libingan ng mga Bayani will be accorded to Wycoco following a Mass tomorrow morning.

Last night, the Association of the Harvard University graduates offered necrological services for the late director. Another service is expected this afternoon by NBI officials and employees.

Wycoco's death came 26 days after he suffered a massive stroke and slipped into a deep coma.

He joined the NBI on Jan. 23, 2001 and was credited with several improvements in the bureau including the transfer of NBI clearance facilities to its new location in Camiido, as well as innovations in the clearance system like the establishment of clearance renewal kiosks and the clearance-on-wheels project.

Prior to his appointment as bureau director, Wycoco had served as the Philippine National Police's second in command as deputy director general—the military's equivalent to three-star general.

After his graduation from the military in 1968, Wycoco was designated as PNP Regional Director for Region I, Director for Police Community Relations, Defense Attache in the United Kingdom, Armed Forces of the Philippines Command and General Staff College instructor and AFP and PNP spokesperson.

SC to veer away from policy of intervention

IN THE KNOW

SC interventions in business

By Cyril L. Bautista
(IN Research)

THERE WERE AT LEAST SIX INTERVENTIONS by the Supreme Court on business issues and/or allegations this newly appointed Chief Justice cited with the majority, except in the Meralco deal case:

Sale of Manila Hotel. The high court overturned in 1997 a government decision to sell the Manila Hotel to a Malaysian business group. The court maintained the sale had violated the "Filipino first" mandate of the Constitution.

Oil deregulation. Voting 8-7 with one abstention, the Supreme Court in 1997 declared Republic Act No. 8180 on oil deregulation unconstitutional because it restricted but competition encouraged monopoly and tended to fail with market forces. The three provisions found unconstitutional by the Supreme Court contained in the deregulation of a 4-peso-a-liter tariff on imports for one oil firm, the requirement of prior-day inventory for new players and the prohibition on predatory pricing.

The case of this decision, then Budget Secretary Salvador Enriquez Jr. said the time Supreme Court justices who voted against the oil deregulation law should be impeached for "damaging an executive function and inordinately encroaching on the executive's power." Enriquez was fined for his impertinence and by some members of Congress. Congress also passed a replacement law.

Jamsom deal. On Jan. 20, 2002, the Supreme Court ruled that the $200-a-ton no-recourse tax agreement between the government and Jamsom Environmental Corp. was valid but nullified its deal that the cost-neutral contract awarded the President's nephew to become effective.

In ruling on the validity of the contract, which the Palgrave Court and then the Court of Appeals had previously upheld, the Supreme Court also enjoined private citizens that incinerators are illegal under the Clean Air Act only if they emit toxic and poisonous fumes.

The MMDA had contested the validity of the contract, claiming that it never got through the negotiation stage since the entire saga by then MMDA Chair Prospero Oreta intervening. Jamsom that it was the winning bidder based only on a proposal that the contract was subject to negotiation.

Piatco contracts. Voting 10-5 in May 2000, the high court declared null and void all five contracts awarded by Philippine International Air Terminals Co. for the construction of the Ninoy Aquino International Airport's Terminal 3.

The Supreme Court said all five Piatco contracts were contrary to public policy and violative of the build-operate-transfer (BOT) law. It said the government should decide to take over the project because of the delay. Piatco but it's obligated to pay "reasonable cost" for the use of the terminal and other related complex.

The court, then court rules that to ease of the absence of the requisite financial capacity of the Fernando consortium, presidential of respondent Piatco, the award for the Pre-qualification, Bids and Awards Committee of the contract for the construction, operation and maintenance of the Ninoy Int'l mall and was," the high tribunal said.

PEA-Amari deal. In 2002, the Supreme Court ruled the joint venture agreement between the Public Estate Authority (PEA) and Amari Coastal Bay and Development Corp. It said the state could not sell the coastline to anybody, whether local or foreign or entities until it.

Comelec modernization. The Supreme Court on suspend in January 2004 the automatic 3-3 tie between the Commission's Comelec and Mega Pacific Solutions (MPS) for automated polls after it found that the Comelec violated the law and its own bidding rules when it awarded the contract. The high court also ordered the Ombudsman to investigate the criminal liability of those involved, and the solicitor general to recover the P946,787,887.41 that had already been spent for the project.

The court voted 9-3-2, with three justices dissenting and two asking for more time. The marks the second time the high court voted to declare modernization contract, after the P8-billion contract for voter registration and biometrics in Mindoro province was nullified in September 2002.

"Though the Philippines wants an automated electoral process, it cannot accept just any system shoved into its hands. Those improper and illegal methods. As the saying goes, the end never justifies the means. Presidential contracting will not promote enlightened results," wrote Associate Justice Leonardo-De Castro.

Justice Jose Vitug dissented, saying the court ignored the liberty of the people and to restrain their prospects and voices of doubt. "I still always resolve the doubt in favor of the liberty of our people."

He said there would be two main doubts in looking at issues ... "namely in favor of the people in terms of their constitutional right and their human rights, and in favor of the government to open the doors of prosperity for our people."

Not experts in economics

"Judges are not experts" in matters of financial and economic policies, he said, and they had better leave them to the "policy makers."

"These are what we call in law political questions, questions that are addressed to the relationship of the elected branches of our officials and the people, these questions are to be judged by the people and not the judiciary," Panganiban said.

He said congressmen and senators "who make these policies will be in power after the people and if they do not like don't want their policies, they will elect a new set of officials that will probably change their policies."

The 60-year-old Sorsogonban declined comment then his appointment had been an offshoot of the government wrestling these policy and asked people to give him the "opportunity to prove my worth as the Chief Justice of this country before I am either praised or criticized."

"I do not know that there is even such a policy," he said, referring to the practice in the Armed Forces of appointing warring generals to serve brief terms as chiefs of staff. Critics said this was the main reason so far has had no tenure rest in the military.

He also denied being close to President Macapagal-Arroyo and vowed to maintain the court's independence.

Pans hurt but stays on

Associate Justice Reynato S. Puno yesterday admitted he had been "hurt" by Ms Arroyo's move bypassing him in favor of Panganiban.

"Indeed, even pans has a purpose," Puno said he asked members to assure the President's "meditative continuational power of appointment."

"The Almighty has a plan for all of

PANGANIBAN judges are not experts in financial and economic policies.

us and I agree that the ill-feeling that does not play-ties with our destinies," said Puno, the most senior among three justices recommended for the post by the Judicial and Bar Council.

In a statement, Puno described aside "rumors" that he was eyeing an early retirement, adding: "Those who desire us to reduce me to posthumous sig. influence will not experience any re-alarm."

He pledged to be "an independent-minded justice, regardless of his consequences" and to "fight for the civil liberties of the people against abuses coming from any side all supreme."

Puno's statement was read by a staff member who, like all others working in Puno's office, wore black.

Controversial jurist

Panganiban has created controversy since January 2001 when he supported Mr Arroyo's claim to the Presidency, as she assumed leadership of the country after President Joseph Estrada was forced to step down by massive street uprisings.

Estrada claimed he was the victim of a conspiracy by the elite, a section of the military that broke away from him, former Cardinal Chavit Sin, and some members of the Supreme Court—a politically independent body which later ruled that Mr Arroyo was the country's legal President.

Since then, Panganiban has been dogged by opposition allegations that he is close to Ms Arroyo, engaging political bias. He denies the allegations and has expressed surprise at his appointment as Chief Justice.

The Supreme Court has still to rule on the constitutionality of controversial moves by the President to restrict political rallies, create commission to recommend amendments to the Constitution, and prevent officials from testifying in Congress without her permission. *With a report from Philip C. Tubeza*

Meralco assailed for pass-on bid

from Napocor whether it used it or not.

Until a final settlement of the dispute has been approved by the ERC, Ed Caffe said the government could still press its collection of the P69 billion in unpaid power bills.

Meralco, however, said it entered into a P29-billion settlement agreement with Napocor in July 2003. Early this year, the Lopez-owned firm filed a petition with the ERC to bring down the amount of unpaid power bills to Napocor to P14.3 billion.

Nonrecourse petition

On Dec. 22, Bagsic's Nonrecourse filed an urgent motion with the ERC amending its petition on the ongoing arbitrage case between Napocor and Meralco after Malacañang enjoined its desire to collect the entire P62 billion from the utility firm—and not just the P28 billion stipulated in the settlement agreement.

But Nonrecourse maintained the position that Meralco's decision not to honor its supply contract with Napocor and buy more expensive power from Lopez-owned independent power producers was its own judgment call.

"Any investment has its risk-risks, advantages and disadvantages. It is but natural that Meralco, which made that sole decision, should be the one to suffer the consequences of its own management's decision and this should not be passed on to its captive consumers," Nonrecourse said in its arguments submitted to the ERC.

Meralco claimed that the debt was not a penalty but "compensation" to Napocor for the head over component of the generation cost arising from unused power supply in the contract.

But Nonrecourse noted that Meralco's 2002 and 2003 annual reports called these debts as penalties and that Meralco officials vehemently objected having the debt labeled as a penalty in the hearings.

Battle

In his program on dzRH radio, Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile said that even has that average lawyers should know that Napocor's supply contract was binding even with ongoing negotiations between Napocor and Meralco for a settlement.

"The contract between Napocor and Meralco has a take or pay it ruled while negotiations for new terms are in progress. It can only be rescinded if a new one has been agreed upon by both parties and the both parties have agreed that it should replace the old one-that," Enrile said in the radio interview.

Meralco has branded as "irresponsible" legislators reports that Meralco was evading the nonrecourse of Meralco's debt into equity swaps over the law.

"There is no provision in the agreement for conversion to equity of Meralco of any amounts to be paid to Napocor," the Meralco board said in a separate statement.

Opposition Rep. Teofisto Guingona Jr. said the government plan to take over Meralco as an attempt by the Arroyo administration to get favorable news coverage from the Lopez-owned ABS-CBN media empire.

"The administration's counter is highly questionable, in this sense: to be a cheap attempt to blackmail the Lopezes and execute ABS-CBN. It will retard and ill-advised," he said.

Events on Wednesday said there were nothing political in the government move to collect the P62 billion from Meralco. *With a report from Philip C. Tubeza*

UNAUTHORIZED DUPLICATION IS STRICTLY FORBIDDEN
PROTECTED BY APPLICABLE LAW

GIs in

By Tonette Orejas
PDI Central Luzon Desk

THE LAWYERS OF two of six American soldiers accused of raping a Filipina have questioned the inclusion of new evidence in the woman's final arguments, urging prosecutors in Olongapo City not to consider these in resolving the case.

In a manifestation filed on Wednesday, the lawyers of Corporal Corey Burris and Lance Corporal Albert Lara cited six "new factual matters" in the woman's Dec. 19 memorandum and which were not in her Nov. 2 sworn affidavit.

These included the mention of the woman as being a graduate of management accounting at the Ateneo de Davao University, the invitation extended to her and her sibling by United States serviceman Carlos Ocasio to the Subic Bay Freeport, and the mention of her drinking "alcoholic drinks."

'Forced to join'

The manifestation also cited accounts of what a US serviceman, identified as "Gerald" or "Genard," did to the woman while at the dance floor of the Neptune Bar and Restaurant, and the woman's asking for an identification card from that man.

The woman said it was at Neptune Bar where she was forced to join the soldiers in their van that was driven by Filipino Timoteo Soriano Jr.

Lawyers Jose Justiniano, Emmanuel Peña Jr., Aris Gulapa and Carlito Zaragoza, who are representing Burris and Lara, said four more new allegations were included in the woman's arguments. The lawyers, however, did not elaborate on these allegations.

They also questioned the use of the US Naval Criminal Investigative Service report on its interrogation of Lance Corporal Daniel Smith, the serviceman identified to have raped the 22-year-old woman.

'Inadmissible'

The NCIS report, they said, was not part of the case's record because it was not submitted to Prosecutor Prudencio Jalandoni.

Jalandoni earlier said he received the report in the third week of November and turned this over to Chief State Prosecutor Jovencito Zuño.

Justiniano clarified they were not asking Jalandoni to reject the entire memorandum of the woman.

Citing the rules of court on evidence, the lawyers told Jalandoni that the new matters were "inadmissible."

Sought for reactions, lawyer Minerva Ambrosio, one of the woman's lead counsels, said: "It's their right [to file a manifestation]. But everything is now the call of Prosecutor Jalandoni."

National Food Authority
Regional Office 10
Balay, Cagayan de Oro City

Invitation to Apply for Eligibility and to Bid
Date: June 30, 2004

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

The National Food Authority Region 10, through its Bids and Awards Committee (BAC), invites Duly Licensed Handling Service Contractors to apply for eligibility and to bid on handling the movement of grains stocks in the warehouses and to rice retail outlets where rice sub-commodities are to be sourced out/delivered by the Contractor (LBC) in the year 2004 as follows:

LOT NO.	PROVINCE	LOCATION OF WAREHOUSE	ESTIMATED VOLUME (BAGS)	APPROVED BUDGET FOR THE CONTRACT (PHP)
1	Bukidnon	NHA, Lapasan Sub-Port, Kauswagan, Bukidnon, Regional Warehouse	100,000	P 60,000.00
2	Camiguin	Warehouse	20,000	P 12,000.00
3	Misamis Occidental	Warehouse, Ozamiz City	30,000	P 18,000.00
4	Misamis Occidental	Warehouse, Oroquieta City	30,000	P 18,000.00
5	Misamis Occidental	Warehouse, Tangub City	30,000	P 18,000.00
6	Misamis Oriental	Warehouse, Cagayan de Oro City (Lapasan)	100,000	P 60,000.00

Prospective bidders should have experience in undertaking a similar project within the last two (2) years with an amount of at least 50% of the project subject to bidding, and have the personnel and equipment (owned, leased, or under the procurement of the project. The list of minimum equipment requirement is indicated in the Eligibility Forms. The Eligibility Check/Screening as well as the Preliminary Examination of Bids, shall use non-discretionary "pass/fail" criteria. Post qualification of the lowest calculated bid shall be conducted.

All participants/ parties in Eligibility Screening and Screening, Bid Security, Performance Security, Pre-Bidding Conferences, Evaluation of Bids, Post-Qualification and Award of Contract shall be governed by the pertinent provisions of R.A. 9184 and its Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR).

The complete schedule of activities is listed, as follows:

ACTIVITIES	LOCATION	DATE	TIME
1. Issuance of Bid Documents	2nd Floor, NFA Regional Office 10, Balay, Cagayan de Oro City	September 15-30, 2004	8:00 AM - 5:00 PM Working Days
2. Pre-Bid Conference	2nd Floor, Conference Room, NFA Regional Office 10, Balay, Cagayan de Oro City	January 5, 2005	1:30 PM
3. Deadline for Submission & Receipt of Eligibility Requirements & Bid Documents	2nd Floor, Conference Room, NFA Regional Office 10, Balay, Cagayan de Oro City	January 17, 2005	1:30 PM
4. Opening of Bids	2nd Floor, Conference Room, NFA Regional Office 10, Balay, Cagayan de Oro City	January 17, 2005	1:30 PM

All Documents will be available only upon payment of a non-refundable amount of Two Thousand Pesos Only (P 2,000.00) (without VAT) at the Cashier of the National Food Authority Regional Office 10, Cagayan de Oro City.

The National Food Authority Region 10 assumes no responsibility whatsoever in connection with or indirectly liability for any expenses incurred in the preparation of the bid.

The National Food Authority Region 10 reserves the right to accept or reject any bid, and to annul the bidding process and reject all bids at any time prior to contract award, without thereby incurring any liability to the bidders.

(SGD) CHARLES D. MACERATAS
BAC Chairman

LBC No. 04-6-1205

More hacienda farmers want stock option deals scrapped

By Blanche S. Rivera

FARMERS IN HIDA LANDHOLDINGS OWNED by the sugar conglomerate opposed to Negros Occidental are moving to give up their stocks and vacate the lands, asking their case from the Congress-owned Hacienda Luisita, which was recently awarded to thousands of farm workers.

The 1,776-ha Oli Farms Inc. in Calatrava and the 600-ha Negros Industrial Development and Processing Inc. in La Carlota have petitions for revocation pending before the Presidential Agrarian Reform Council.

The 1,944-ha Waltonia Holdings Inc. in Calatrava and six other haciendas belonging to Danding Cojuangco's Tarlac-based Asia Sugar Corp. have petitions for revocation pending before the Department of Agrarian Reform Adjudication Board (DARAB).

The 1,944-ha Waltonia Holdings Inc. in Calatrava and six other haciendas belonging to Danding Cojuangco's Tarlac-based Asia Sugar Corp. have petitions for revocation pending before the Department of Agrarian Reform Adjudication Board (DARAB).

"There is a popular sentiment that their SDOs can be scrapped because of the same reasons as Luisita," he said in a press briefing yesterday.

Carranza, who did an extensive study of Hacienda Luisita in the 1990s, is also studying the 500 SDOs now in Negros. The province has 10 of the 11 stock schemes approved by the PARC as the landowners' way of complying with the RA 6657 or the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law.

"Like the farmers of Luisita, their lives are miserable. But unlike Luisita [beneficiaries], they were not for/moved into approving the SDO. They really believed in the promises, but they don't have a say," Carranza said.

The PARC, the highest governing body on agrarian reform in the country, voted on Tuesday to cancel the stock scheme that has been in effect at the 4,915-ha Hacienda Luisita in Tarlac for the past 15 years.

Carranza said a petition for revocation of the SDO in the Asuda haciendas was already going around for signatures of the beneficiaries. Majority of the farm workers were eager to own the lands instead of company shares.

Farmers from the Lakeview Plantation Agricultural Corp. in Bais City were not able to join the meeting and were unlikely to be able to work for a revocation because they were intimidated by the landowners, Carranza said.

The petitions for revocation would be submitted to the provincial agrarian reform offices who will investigate the alleged violations of the SDO contracts.

The PARC will submit his report to the regional directors of the Department of Agrarian Reform, who will then forward it to the secretary. "The DAR chief can either conduct an independent investigation or immediately endorse the resolution to the PARC.

"They will file the petition early January because they don't want to risk whatever Christmas benefits they may receive from the company," Carranza said of the farmer beneficiaries.

RP's foreign debt dips to $55.5B

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE COUNTRY'S FOREIGN DEBT declined by 1 percent to $55.5 billion at end-September from a quarter ago due to the depreciation of the Japanese yen against the US dollar and increase in residents' investment in Philippine debt papers.

The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas reported yesterday that the total external debt stock—which is dominated by public sector borrowings—also eased by a marginal 0.3 percent from $55.6 billion a year ago.

External liabilities of the public sector represented 57.9 percent of total, while the rest consisted of private obligations.

BSP Gov. Rafael Buenaventura said "A moderate yen-steady decline of public sector share in total external debt has been observed during the past four quarters, from 60.1 percent in December 2004, to 58.8 percent in March 2005 and 58.2 percent in June."

The country's external debt ratio to gross national product was down 55.9 percent at end-September, an improvement of 4.6 percentage points over the 60.5 percent level a year ago, he noted.

"This reflected the strengthened position of the country to pay maturing obligations on a continuing basis," Buenaventura said.

He added that the decline in the debt stock during the third quarter resulted largely from negative foreign exchange revaluation adjustments as the US dollar appreciated versus the Japanese yen as well as from increased investments by locals in Philippine debt papers.

When the government or some private companies issue offshore bonds, the portion bought by local investors is excluded from the foreign debt stock. An increase in residents' investments in Philippine foreign debt papers thus reduces the total external debt.

CHRISTMAS CHEER!
Children with cancer and their parents are greeted by beauty guru Ricky Reyes at the Hearing Pumpkin cancer ward of the Philippine General Hospital Cancer Institute where they held their Christmas party recently. Reyes adopted the cancer ward nine years ago to help the young cancer patients with medicine, food and cash donation from good-hearted donors.

Sandigan: No extension for Erap's holiday leaves

By Helen F Flores

THE SANDIGANBAYAN SPECIAL DIVISION yesterday denied for lack of merit the motion of former President Joseph Estrada seeking a modification in the court order that allowed him to leave his detention center in Tanay, Rizal, and spend Christmas and New Year with his estranged mother.

The Special Division, in rejecting Estrada's motion, said the court already arrived "at what it considered as the most reasonable arrangements primarily taking into consideration the age and condition of the mother of the former President and our time-honored tradition during Christmas season. In view thereof, the court finds no cogent reason to amend the Order dated Dec. 14, 2005."

Earlier, the Special Division allowed Estrada to leave his detention center at 1 p.m. on Dec. 24 and proceed to wherever his mother, Doña Mary Ejercito, would be and stay with her up to 5 p.m. on Christmas day. A similar time frame was adopted by the court when it allowed the ex-President to leave Tanay on Dec. 31 ,also to visit his mother.

However, Estrada, through his lawyers Jose Sor, Rene Saguisag, Jun Mocorro asked the anti-graft court's Special Division to extend his Christmas and New Year's passes by 14 hours each.

Saguisag explained that all Estrada is asking for is to be allowed to stay with his ailing mother until 7 a.m. on Dec. 26 and Jan. 2, 2006.

Estrada is detained in his Tanay rest house due to the plunder and perjury charges filed by the government.

Running priest banished anew

By Christine V. Esguerra

ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S most vocal clergymen has been banished from his parish, the second time in two years.

Fr. Robert Reyes, a constant critic of the Church hierarchy's position on political issues, has been asked to leave the Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal Parish in Project 4, Quezon City, effective Jan. 15, the bayonet has learned.

Cubao Bishop Honesto Ongtioco has also had told the maverick moving priest to "take a sabbatical," which is said to be a euphemism to get rid of an unwanted subordinate.

Ongtioco, known to be a strict disciplinarian among the priests, earlier announced his decision during Mass at the Immaculate Conception Cathedral in Cubao last Dec. 8, according to a highly reliable source.

The bayonet kept calling the bishop's office yesterday but got no reply.

Despite the comment, Reyes didn't seem bothered by the decision.

All packed up

"It doesn't matter that it would keep me from being what I am and from doing what I must," he told the bayonet on Wednesday night.

He said he had finished packing up and had already left the parish.

His other reason was given to justify the move, according to the bayonet source who described it as "strange" considering that it's usually priests who send a subordinate.

Just two years ago, Reyes was moved out of the more prominent parish of the Holy Sacrifice on the University of the Philippines campus in Diliman to the more obscure location in Project 4.

Observers then believed the transfer was meant to temper Reyes who had been very vocal on political issues.

But it apparently didn't keep him from campaigning against corruption and other scandals in government, including President Macapagal-Arroyo's alleged manipulation of the 2004 election.

Reyes acknowledged that detractors might claim that he was banished simply because his views clashed with those that had been keeping him from his duties as his parish.

But he maintained that he still diligently said Mass at this parish every 6 a.m. daily even while he was having his a total of 162 days at the Bright Future Montessori on Iriga.

"I never swerved in my responsibilities in my parish," he said.

Reyes went on hiatus under the text he dubbed "Talitol Ong Ano," saying he would stay on until Mr. Ongtioco was ousted.

'Virtual parish'

Last Sunday, he packed up and created a "virtual parish," ostensibly in response to his banishment from Project 4. The site, www.bukal.com/kabol, is set to be launched on Christmas Day.

He said it would be his way of contributing his own views on social and political issues which have often run against those of the Catholic hierarchy.

But he made clear that he was not distancing himself from the Church.

"I see a lack of dynamism and perhaps, insight, into the social realities in the position of the Church," he said.

Reyes' Internet-based parish was inspired by Pentecia, the "online diocese" put up in 1996 by French Bishop Jacques Gaillot.

Pentecia was named after the former diocese in present-day Algeria that no longer exists. It's accurately termed as a cyber-diocese who died isolated from society or the Church.

Gaillot, 69, named his "diocese without borders" after the Vatican dispelled him as bishop of Evreux the year before because of long-running conflicts on pastoral issues.

Gaillot is a strong critic of the Gulf War and a champion of human rights activists, abused immigrants, and political prisoners. He also openly embraced the possibility of allowing married men to be ordained priests.

Like the French bishop, Reyes is no fan of many of his superiors' position and actions on issues such as the "Hello Garci" scandal.

He criticized some bishops for accepting hefty donations sourced from casinos.

He also slammed Davao Archbishop Fernando Capalla, the former president of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, when the prelate called for national reconciliation. He thought Capalla's appeal unwisely echoed Mrs. Arroyo's tired mantra in the face of criticism.

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Cito Lorente B. Cueva

Saddam claims torture by US

BAGHDAD—SADDAM HUSSEIN TOLD HIS TRIAL on Wednesday he was beaten in US custody and, in an extraordinary outburst towards the end of the hearing, also said those who had tortured Iraqis should be punished for their crimes.

The former Iraqi president spent most of the session sitting quietly in the defendants' dock as prosecution witnesses told the court of the beatings and abuse they and other former detainees say they suffered in Saddam's jails.

But late in the hearing, the man who ruled Iraq for a quarter of a century rose to his feet and told the judge he had been abused by US forces since his arrest in late 2003.

"I have been hit by the detainees and tortured," he said, speaking purposefully. "I have been beaten in every piece of my body, and the signs are all over my body."

Then, in one of the more vociferous statements he has made during the trial, he said those guilty of the alleged torture should be punished, appearing to be referring himself both to the accusations.

"When I hear that any Iraqi has been hurt it hurts me too," the 68-year-old said. "The wrongs that were done to those people were wrong and, according to law, those who did it should get what they deserve."

In Washington, the White House dismissed Saddam's allegation he was tortured in US custody as preposterous.

"That's one of the most preposterous things I've heard from Saddam Hussein recently," spokesperson Scott McClellan said.

"Saddam Hussein is being treated the exact opposite of the way his regime treated those he imprisoned and tortured simply for expressing their opinions. And as I reject that."

State Department spokesperson Sean McCormack described the allegation as "highly ironic."

"Look, he's been given indeed a groundbreaking trial, but where the brutal should be to ask the testimony of those people who were victimized ..." he told reporters.

"That's what people should be keeping in."

The court heard from three witnesses who made some of the most coherent, specific and at times chilling allegations yet against Saddam's followers.

One witness told the court how guards in Saddam's intelligence service heated up plastic tubing and allowed the hot plastic to drip on to the bodies of victims.

It sounded until he was given electric shocks. While he screamed in agony in the torture chamber at the headquarters of the intelligence service in Baghdad, Saddam's half-brother and former intelligence chief Barzan Ibrahim al-Tikriti sat grinning and watched, the witness said.

The third witness, who, like the second, spoke from behind a curtain to hide his identity, said Saddam's guards attached electrodes to his hands, feet and penis and gave him electric shocks before pulling out his fingernails and toenails.

Saddam and seven co-defendants including Barzan are charged with crimes against humanity relating to the killing of 148 people from the mainly Shiite village of Dujail, north of Baghdad, in the 1980s.

While previous witnesses have given sometimes rambling and generalized accounts of their hardships under Saddam, the first witness on Wednesday, Ali Hassan al-Rashid, was prosecutors

FORMER Iraqi President Saddam Hussein addresses the court during the resumption of his trial on Dec. 21 in Baghdad. Iraq. Saddam and seven co-defendants are on trial in the deaths of more than 148 Shiites following a 1982 assassination attempt against him in the town of Dujail, north of Baghdad. —Reuters

Brazil opens files on dirty war

BRASILIA, BRAZIL— BRAZIL HUMAN RIGHTS ON Wednesday published documents detailing the 1964-85 military dictatorship on Wednesday but a human rights group accused the government of withholding crucial information on torture and killing.

Millions of pages of previously secret documents, photographs, films and pamphlets from the intelligence service were transferred to the National Archive, where declassified items can be viewed on request.

The move followed pressure from international watchdogs and torture victims to provide information on those missing or killed during the military regime's "dirty war" against political opponents.

Cristian Daniel Tilman Hoenoff, a former guerrilla fighter and political prisoner, said opening the files would bolster democracy and lead to a better understanding of history.

"Society needs to ask itself why these things occurred and whether, with many imprisoned, tortured and killed," she told reporters.

But a human rights campaigner said the government failed to make public vital documents.

"The files say nothing about torture, killings, disappearances or burials," said Cecilia Coimbra, a leader of the rights group Tortura Nunca Mais. "The government knows the whereabouts of the bodies of many dissidents and it is not handing them out." —Reuters

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Nine Rm. Lucio East Cemte
Bifid Pluma Ave.
III. De La Salle-Taft
A. Luna Pasig
MC Home Depot-Fort Bonifacio
Metro Point Mall-Pasay

LUZON

Balintawak III. Lundy
Alabang Town Center
Commonwealth-Regalado
Fairview-Quezon
Miranda-Angeles
Santiago-Isabela
F. Tolentino-Tanauan
Dasmariñas-Manggahan
San Agustin-San Fernando
Olongapo-Rizal Avenue
Sta Rosa-Tagaytay Road
Tiaong-Maharlika Highway
Villa Mendoza-A. Bautista
Binakayan-Kawit
Aguinaldo Highway-Dasmariñas
Malvar-Sta. Rosa
Rizal St.-Legaspi
San Luis-Pinaglabanan
Gen. Luna-Baguio
Old Route-Lipa
North Colombo-Crossing
Kumintang-Batangas
Quezon Ave.-Lucena

VISAYAS

Osmeña Blvd.-Cebu
Cebu-Ayala
Tacloban-Cebu
North Mandaue
Bacolod-Gatpuno
Lacson-Bacolod
Iloilo-Diversoria St.

MINDANAO

Valencia-Cagayan De Oro
Old Route-Davao
Sta. Ana-Davao
Santiago St.-General Santos

BRANCHES OPEN ON DECEMBER 30
Banking Hours: 9am - 12nn

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T. Morato-Kamuning
Shangrila Plaza Mall-EDSA
SM City Fairview
Greenhills Shopping Center
Alabang Town Center-Ayala
Robinson's Metro East-Ugong
Taytay National Highway
M. De Garcia-Iloilo
Walter Mart-Makati

LUZON

Cubao Luzon
Fairview Robert Regular
Pasay-Dagupan
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Why has Bin Laden been silent for a year?

By Habib Trabelsi

IMAN—HE HAS NOT BEEN DAILY public statement all year. Speculation has grown over his influence, health and even possible death. Where is the Islamist world's most wanted man, Osama bin Laden?

The al-Qaida leader's period of silence is the longest since the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, offering no clues to the whereabouts or fate of a man who this year appears to have quietly slipped off the radar.

Bin Laden has not been heard of since a Dec. 27, 2004 audiotape in which he mocked Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Iraq's most wanted man, as al-Qaida's leader in the war-torn country.

Just before, on Dec. 16, 2004, a video surfaced where he also called on his fighters to strike Gulf oil supplies and warned Israel leaders they risked a popular uprising.

Since then—silence. Regular interventions by al-Qaida's number two Ayman al-Zawahiri, seen as the ideological brains of the network, has only served to feed feverish speculation as to what has happened to bin Laden.

Zawahiri released in a statement released in September that bin Laden was still alive and leading "Jihad" on daily wars against the West.

"Al-Qaida, for help now is still, thanks to God, a base for jihad. Its prime Osama bin Laden, may God protect him, still leads the jihad," said Zawahiri.

Militant President Bernt Marhaoud said recently he did not know whether Bin Laden was dead or alive, adding that he would not like to speculate over his fate.

The commander of U.S. troops in Afghanistan, Lieut. Lieutenant-Gen. Andrew Roberts Bin Laden was still considered alive, and that US forces continue their hunt for him.

Seemingly more candid was CIA director Porter Goss, who recently told ABC news channel that Bin Laden's hideout was known and implied that the CIA knew more than it would reveal.

US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, meanwhile, this week said he doubted that Bin Laden was now capable of supervising the global operations of the militant organization.

The total eclipse of Bin Laden also gave rise to various speculations on Islamist websites, with some admirers of the terror chief already contemplating that he might be dead.

"Bin Laden, tracked by the intelligence services of the entire world, is a hiding somewhere along the mountain frontiers between Pakistan and Afghanistan," opined one blogger.

Another claimed that Nike Mobile—Bin Laden's late deliberately decided to stop all communications to avoid being hunted by gigantic US surveillance devices."

"O my beloved, I know that you are injured. My body can epitome the suffer all God has decreed for people of strong will," said Zawahiri.

Addressed to bin Laden, his words are couched in a "letter of affection" addressed online to Bin Laden's friend's corner claiming that al-Qaida chief had perished in the Oct. 8 earthquake which ravaged Pakistan.

But the editor of the Islamist-bent "Hudoonnick," Bayoth Ali Lahoth, who is also an expert on al-Qaida, appeared confident as to Bin Laden's safety.

"I think he is alive and well. Although, Bin Laden is not to great health, but he is not at the point of death, all that we have about his fate is nothing but media speculation. His death would certainly be announced by al-Qaida, in accordance with Sharia (Islamic law)," he said. AFP

Wanna stop snoring? Try the Australian didgeridoo

LONDON—EFFE AMMO AT night by a snoring partner? The answer to your woes could be—believe it or not—with the Australian didgeridoo.

Researchers in Switzerland investigated 25 patients who suffered from snoring and moderate obstructive sleep apnea syndrome, both common sleep disorders.

Half the group were given daily breathing exercises playing the didgeridoo, a wind instrument about 1.5 m long which originated in northern Australia and is traditionally made from the trunk of a eucalyptus tree, hunt for bits.

The study, published in the British Medical Journal's online edition on Friday, found that those who played the unusual instrument over a four-month trial period saw a significant improvement in their daytime sleepiness and apnea.

Their partners also reported less disturbance from snoring.

The researchers said strengthening the upper airways through the breathing techniques required to play the didgeridoo was behind the improvement. —Reuters

Bird flu becoming resistant to Tamiflu

JAKARTA – (KOMPAS.COM/AFP) bird flu death toll rose to 11 Thursday amid mounting new evidence that the virus may be developing resistance to Tamiflu, the only drug known to be effective against it.

A 30-year-old man and an eight-year-old boy were the country's latest victims of the H5N1 strain of the virus, a hospital spokesperson said.

"It's been confirmed. We were informed of the results this morning," Sitti Supari, a spokesperson for Sulianti Saroso Hospital, Indonesia's main infectious disease hospital, told Agence France-Presse (AFP).

Indonesia, the world's fourth most populous nation, routinely sends samples of cases that test positive to labs abroad for verification.

The man, a resident of South Jakarta, died on Dec. 13, a day after being admitted to the hospital. The boy died two days after at a private hospital in Jakarta.

Health ministry official Hotmich Wilmann said the test results were from the Geneva-for Disease Control in the United States and said from a World Health Organization-linked laboratory in Hong Kong, as Putra said earlier.

Adhed about the contradictory information, Putra said: "My information was obtained from the health ministry's research and development center. But in any case, it's confirmed."

Most victims in Indonesia have come from densely populated Jakarta, where many people still live in close proximity to poultry, providing ideal conditions for the virus to pass to humans.

In Sitrosari, bird flu had become resistant to the antiviral drug Tamiflu in two Sitrosari cases, a doctor said in what he called a worrying development.

Tamiflu is considered a frontline defense against bird flu and the most effective treatment available to counter the H5N1 strain.

Menno de Jong, from the Institute of Tropical Diseases in southern Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh City, said Tamiflu was ineffective in fighting the virus in two girls who died despite being given full doses of the drug.

"They were persistently virus-resistant despite a full dose of treatment. Both died and in one patient there are some suggestions that the therapeutic failure and ultimately her death may have been caused by the development of resistance," he said.

The patient was a 13-year old, who died eight days after showing the first symptoms. The other, 16, died three weeks after the onset of symptoms.

"What we'll be important is to try to learn as much as possible from the new patients. We need to improve treatment of bird flu in this region," he said.

Vietnam has been the country hardest hit by bird flu, which has killed more than 75 people across Asia.

In China state media reported that human cases of bird flu caution had begun this week, with six volunteers being given shots. AFP

US Embassy warns of Christmas attacks in Indonesia

JAKARTA – INDONESIA ON IS A HIGH TERROR of extremist attacks over the Christmas-New Year holiday season, the US Embassy warned Thursday, after hotels and foreigners were also advised to be aware of kidnappings.

"The embassy reminds Americans that in recent years, terrorist attacks have occurred in Indonesia during the Christmas and New Year's holiday season," it said. "The possibility of terrorist attacks appears even higher this year."

The embassy said information obtained last month, when police killed terrorist Azahari Husin, showed militants "were in the advanced stages of planning additional attacks against Western establishments."

Videotaped threats against Westerners by terrorists — suspected to be Azahari's accomplice Noordin Mohammad Top — found at Azahari's hideout were being taken "very seriously," it said.

Azahari, a Malaysian national, was cornered by police in the East Java hill resort town of Batu, where he was killed in a hail of bullets. An accomplice, that he was holed up with, blew himself up. AFP

SINGER Sir Elton John (right) and his partner David Furnish pose for photographs at the Guildhall in Windsor, Dec. 21, after conducting a short civil "wedding" ceremony at the registery office. AFP

Elton, hundreds other gays, wed

LONDON—[T]HOUSANDS OF THE world's rich, music and sport joined Elton John Wednesday night to celebrate the pop superstar's civil partnership "wedding" to longtime partner David Furnish.

The couple's relationship was legally recognized in a dazzling ceremony in Windsor, west of London, making them among the first of (nearly) 750 gay and lesbian couples to tie the knot in England and Wales.

John, 58, and his 43-year-old Canadian film director partner exchanged vows in the same 17th century Guildhall venue where Prince Charles wed Camilla Parker Bowles last April.

Four of the singer—who in the 1980s was married to a female German recording superstar—filled the ranks of the well-heeled room, while others followed the action on live television.

But while the ceremony was surrounded by only a handful of guests, including the couple's parents, stars were out in force Wednesday evening for a reception at the couple's mansion near Windsor.

The guest list included singer Kiesza Beckham, actress Helena Bonham Carter and fast film director husband Tim Burton, actress Ingrid Michael Caine, plus British tennis ace Greg Rusedski and England cricket captain Michael Vaughan.

Actress Liz Hurley joined the Beckham family—Grey Hannin, Jack and Bella—Mr. pop star Lulu, former Beatles drummer Ringo Starr, Elvis Costello, tennis champion Boris Becker and golfer Nick Faldo.

Blue shoes were former Fellow Australian Kylie, Hollywood actress Sharon Stone, plus supermodel Claudia Schiffer and designer Donatella Versace from the world of fashion.

The scenes outside John's home were chaotic, with cars stuck back almost half-a-mile waiting to be ushered past the high security at the gates.

Kiesza Jackson, a local from Windsor stuck in the traffic, joked: "This is probably the best traffic jam I've been stuck in."

Earlier, the slightly rotund John sported a pair of tinted glasses and a salmon-colored tie as he arrived in a black Rolls-Royce limousine with Furnish, smiling and waving to the crowd. Both were dressed in dark morning suits.

"They kissed at the end. It was very, very happy. It was just like any other couple getting married," said art dealer Jay Jopling, who witnessed the pair for the host.

"It was beautiful. It was very emotional," added his wife, the artist and photographer Sam Taylor-Wood.

The pair were among nearly 100 same-sex couples across the country who lined up to sign official papers giving them virtually the same rights as heterosexual couples to assess the inheritance and tax.

Among the first to take advantage of new legislation were three couples who simultaneously signed on the dotted line at exactly 8 a.m.

That was the moment when the register office opened for what would be a busy day in the Britain's south coast city of Brighton, England's self-styled gay capital.

The civil partnership act came into force on Dec. 5, having provoked little controversy. But even gay couples are also required to mark a one-year waiting period, which means the ceremonies could not take place until this week.

Though most birthings will take place in England and Wales, the first in the United Kingdom as a whole were conducted Monday in Northern Ireland, followed Tuesday in Scotland.

As the government hailed the development as "another step along the road of equality," in northeast England openly homosexual Anglican vicar Christopher Wardale, 51, ran into controversy with his own bishop, Professor Malcolm Macourt, 58, his patron of 22 years.

In Brighton, wedding planner Glen Meriano said Mike Ullett became among the first to sign the register at the stroke of dawn.

In the British capital, one couple booked a cupcake on the London Eye—the Ferris-style wheel on the south bank of the River Thames—to celebrate the happiest day of their lives with the city literally at their feet.

The wheel was illuminated with pink lights to mark the occasion. AFP

Consensual group sex not prostitution or threat to society, says Canada SC

OTTAWA—GROUP SEX AMONG consenting adults is neither prostitution nor a threat to society, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled on Wednesday in it lifted a ban on so-called "swingers" clubs.

In a ruling that changes the way Canadian courts determine what poses a threat to the population, the top court threw out the convictions of a Montreal man who ran a club where members could have group sex in a private room behind locked doors.

"Consensual conduct behind code-locked doors can hardly be supposed to jeopardize a society as rigorous and tolerant as Canadian society," said the opinion of the seven-to-two majority, written by Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin.

The decision does not affect laws against prostitution because no money changed hands among the adults having sex.

The court was reviewing an appeal by Jean-Paul Labaye, who ran the Objage (Thunderstruck) club. He had been convicted in 1999 of running a "bawdy house"—defined as a place where prostitution or acts of public indecency took place.

Labaye, who is still running the club, said he would go ahead with a new venture with backing from a group of Florida investors.

Nite Sugar clients will be more calm. This will probably lead the way to a good future," he told reporters, saying he was looking at adding a hot tub and a swimming pool.

Labaye said he had about 2,000 regular clients who paid around C$20 ($17) a year for a membership card.

Lawyers for Labaye and the owner of another Montreal swingers' club argued that consensual sex among groups of adults behind closed doors was neither indecent or a risk to society.

The Supreme Court Judges agreed.

"Criminal indecency or obscenity must rest on actual harm or a significant risk of harm to individuals or society. The Crown failed to establish this essential element of the offense. Our case must therefore fail," McLachlin wrote.

In indecency cases, Canadian courts have traditionally looked whether the acts in question "invaded the tolerance of ordinary" necessary for the proper functioning of society." The Supreme Court ruled that from now on, judges should pay more attention to whether acts they would be actually harmed.

This seemed to ensure there could be no repeat of Labaye's original conviction for creating "social harm" by allowing degrading and dehumanizing group sex to take place.

Social conservatives said the ruling would contribute to a general relaxing of indecency standards.

"The court is essentially saying that fairly public sexual acts can be tolerated in commercial establishments," said Janet Epp Buckingham of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.

"We [worry] it is disappointing [judgment] ... You wonder if the court is an appropriate place for these kinds of decisions to be taking place because they don't have broad public hearings with a lot of public input," she told Reuters.

The judges said that just because some Canadians might disapprove of swingers' clubs, this did not necessarily mean the establishments were socially dangerous.

"The causal link between images of sexuality and anti-social behavior cannot be assumed. Attitudes to [homosexuality] are not crimes, however virulent they may be or disgusting they may appear," the judges said, noting no one had been prosecuted to have sex or had public sex in the cases before the court. Reuters

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FESTIVE MOSCOW
A street vendor waits for customers at the Manezh square in Moscow Dec. 21. Moscow prepares for the New Year festivities and the Orthodox Christmas which Russians celebrate on January 7th. AFP

Hong Kong defeated on political reforms

HONG KONG—THE HONG KONG GOVERNment Wednesday suffered defeat of its proposals for limited political reform amid a bitter row over the slow pace of democratic change in the Chinese territory.

Prodemocracy legislators, who said the reforms did not go far enough, rejected recommendations to expand the committee which elects the chief executive and to enlarge the legislature.

The government had proposed doubling the size of the election committee, currently dominated by Beijing-backed elites, to 1,600. It had also recommended enlarging the half-elected, half-appointed legislature from 60 to 70 seats.

Both proposals had 34 votes in favor, 24 against and one abstention. Constitutional changes need the support of two-thirds of the chamber, or 40 members.

Chief executive Donald Tsang, who had lobbied hard for the reforms, called the result "regrettable" and "disappointing."

"For the past few months, I had hoped for a Christmas present from the Legislative Council and unfortunately it hasn't come true," he said.

"We have lost an opportunity to take a significant step towards democracy."

Tsang said the government would accept the legislature's decision.

"But democratic development doesn't stop here. I have the responsibility to lead Hong Kong to reach the ultimate goal of achieving universal suffrage," he said.

"I just understand how formidable this task is."

The two-sided bill, put forth by Beijing-appointed Tsang, was aimed at quelling a clamor for full democracy that has steadily grown since Hong Kong reverted to Chinese rule in 1997.

Democrats, who want Tsang to provide a concrete timetable for reform, said the proposals would have failed to achieve the post-colonial constitution's goal of allowing citizens to elect their leaders.

"I think we need a country that respects the aspirations of the people. I'm proud of being a Chinese if China is strong, not only in terms of its military strength and its economy but rather a respect for human rights and the wishes of the people," Democratic Party chair Li Wing-tat said in the chamber after the vote.

Ma Lik, chair of the progovernment Democratic Alliance for the Betterment of Hong Kong, regretted the outcome.

"I found (the result) was very regrettable. If you want democracy you should have supported the motion earlier," he said.

Rejection of the bill is an embarrassment for Tsang, who took over as chief executive in June, and a major victory for the democrats.

Tens of thousands of demonstrators took to the streets earlier this month to demand the universal suffrage promised to them eight years ago, in the biggest display of public anger since Tsang took office in June.

Prodemocracy legislators have traveled to the United States and Europe to drum up support, while Tsang had made a last-ditch effort on Monday to defuse the crisis.

As a sop to the democrats Tsang had proposed to abolish appointed seats on district councils, the lowest rung of government, in a move seen as significant due to the government's dependence on the appointees for support.

Tsang made an appeal for support in a rare television speech last month, warning that rejection of the electoral reform package would only make it more difficult for Hong Kong to achieve universal suffrage.

The chief executive offered the modest reform proposals after Beijing last year ruled out a swift transition to full democracy.

The ruling Chinese Communist Party fears political upheaval may destabilize the economy of its richest city and spark calls for reform on the mainland. *AFP*

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OPINION

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Address: Inquirer Building, 40 North Science Avenue, Mandaluyong City, Philippines 1552
Telefax: 896-6161 (Editorial), 896-6000 (Circulation), 896-6060 (Advertising)
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Silver linings

WHEN THE PRICE OF CRUDE OIL IN THE WORLD market was registering record highs, Bukidnon Rep. Miguel Zubiri came up with a bill establishing the National Fuel Ethanol Program to promote the nationwide production and use of the bio-fuel ethanol. This was around August this year. The hype then stood in an editorial that efforts to cushion the impact of the oil crisis on the Philippine economy and **EDITORIAL** the Filipino people could only succeed if everyone contributed his/her share.

On Nov. 7, 2009, Zubiri's bill got the nod of the House of Representatives. One week later, the bill was in the Senate. Meanwhile, Sen. Manuel Roxas had filed a complementary bill also promoting the production, distribution and use of motor vehicles powered by alternative fuels such as—aside from ethanol—"fuel cell technology, hybrid technology, electric power technology or other alternative fuel motor vehicle technologies."

"Every cloud has its silver lining..." says the proverb, which is really another way of saying that in every problem lies an opportunity. And again this is being proven true.

The crisis, fueled by runaway oil prices these past two years, has been especially cruel on our people's pockets. The good thing about it though is that it seems to have "organized" our people better in looking more seriously for our-of-the-box solutions to our ever-dependence on—or call it addiction to—imported oil.

This is not to say that the country was totally clueless about this problem to the past. Since the time of ferdinand Marcos, every administration has acknowledged the necessity of reducing our country's dependence on oil imports. And we were able to open up, develop and tap more indigenous energy sources, like geothermal power, through the years.

But except for some sporadic displays of national zeal for the cause of energy dependence, nation fell short of rhetoric. The public in general cared little, if at all, that the economy was leaking with so much wasted electricity and extravagant fuel consumption. Oil imports climbed from 9.5 million barrels in 1980 to 52.9(61 million barrels in 2004. But it would be as pointless to blame President Macapagal-Arroyo or those who preceded her in office for every price spike or allowing her to take credit for every price rollback.

The present crisis has been building up in May 2004, when the benchmark Dubai crude soared to a 13-year high of $36.22 a barrel. Since then, the price would rise for every conceivable reason—ranging from natural disasters (hurricanes threatening or hitting the Gulf of Mexico) to political upheavals (war in Iraq) to market movements (higher demand). Then in September this year, the price hit $73 per barrel.

But even if the price has moderated at $60 a barrel, very few would argue that oil prices would go down any time soon to where they were two years ago. President Arroyo, in fact, warned other leaders at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations summit that oil prices could spike out of control.

But certainly the crisis has led us into a vista of opportunities overlooking an open field of solutions for both the energy crisis and other problems. For example, by developing the essentially agri-based bio-fuels (which are not only environment friendly and renewable but can also be produced locally from indigenous sources, like sugarcane, coconut, corn and cassava), we may yet catch up with the elusive consumable development goal we have been dreaming of for decades. The bio-fuels program can perk up employment in our sluggish rural communities, which can slacken the pull of migration to urban centers. The promises seem endless, really.

But there all these plans regarding bio-fuels are essentially still on the drawing board. Many details have yet to be thrashed out. There are many things that need to be done before even a fraction of what we have in mind can be put to action. We are far behind our Asian neighbors in this effort. In other words, there is a long way to go and the Zubiri and House bills are but small steps in that direction. And we are are moving fast enough. We are still mostly talking.

The proverb does not talk about a silver lining alone. It says in full: "Every cloud has its silver lining, but it sometimes is a little difficult to get it to the mint."

So there we are. It is not enough that we look at the silver lining. We must get that silver to the mint. And it is long past midnight for doing this.

This Christmas, give gifts to animals, too

MERRY CHRISTMAS TO EVERYONE, including Presidents Macapagal-Arroyo and Fidel Ovallesteros! With respect and the rest of the Pinoy family, drop the blessings and the light of heaven's smile upon them so that they will let us through in the high moment of power but at they really are from the viewpoint of the common people. For pride, after all, is the most deadly of the cardinal sins, and humility and honesty the most important of the virtues.

AS I SEE IT

Neal H. Cruz

Every Christmas, we never forget to give gifts to our family members, relatives and friends. We greet them Merry Christmas, and still enjoy long chats and good food while dining during Christmas parties. But we usually forget our some members of our families: our pets.

Our dogs and cats are usually locked away somewhere during parties as they won't disturb the guests. In fact, they are forgotten during the greatest part of every day. Yet they are the members of the family who welcome you for you when you are at work or away somewhere having a good time with your fellow humans. They wait patiently the whole day for you to come home and when they hear the hum of the car or your footsteps at the door, they jump up with joy to welcome you.

But do you greet them when you come in, pat their heads, rattle their throats or scratch their tummies? Probably not. You probably yell at the dog for pissing his paws on your pants and at the cat for clawing on your leg. Angrily stop them before it went your leg.

That's how human usually repay the love and affection of animals. Pets are often more loyal and affectionate than humans, without asking for anything. But we don't give back to them their loyalty and affection.

I am hearing sentimental about animals because I just came from the Christmas party of the Philippine Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) at its Animal Rehabilitation Center in Quezon City. I am writing about it now because we spend lots of money for business but very little for our pets. I mean the ordinary Filipino dogs and cats, the so-called "askals" (for "asong kalye") and "pusakals" (for "pusang kalye"). The so-called breeds that their owners show off at dog and cat shows.

The askals and pusakals, on the other hand, are the leftovers and rarely get vaccinations. When they get sick, they rarely get veterinary care. They are not exotic in the streets where they scrounge for food from trash cans and are impregnated by male strays. The puppies are usually given away. They are the lucky ones. Infants are often abandoned on sidewalks and vacant lots subject, if they don't die, they grow up to become starved and diseased, rabies carriers, reproducing indiscriminately until they die as a young age.

Because of irresponsible pet owners, many Filipino dogs and cats become strays and become problems. A human once a while puppy or kitten and takes it home. The puppy or kitten is loved and cared for well... but only while they are small and cute. Once they grow into no longer-cute adults, the human owners don't have any time in their interests, and sometimes toshed out of the yards.

Ironically, this happens only to our native dogs. The imported breeds are treated differently. They are almost always very well cared for and given the best of trips to the vet.

I am exasperated by this attitude of many of Filipinos even with regard to dogs and cats. Native dogs and cats make better pets than the pure breeds. They are tested to canine diseases resistance and do not need expensive vaccinations. And they are just as handsome as the pure breeds, given the same grooming and vet care. They can also be trained like the pure breeds.

Their disadvantage is that they don't have the status of Labrador Retrievers and German Shepherds, Rottweilers and Doberman, poodles and terriers, or Persian and Siamese cats—and many pet owners are status seekers.

A pet-welfare society, Cats Philippines, is trying to give status to unique native dogs. "Proudly Pinoy" is its slogan and it encourages owners to take their "proudly Pinoy" dogs and cats to show exhibitions.

But going back to the problem of unwanted pets, PAWS is doing a wonderful job of rescuing abandoned pets, rehabilitating them and having them adopted by caring families. Cats is addressing the problem of excess and expanding population by spaying and neutering dogs and cats, including the strays, so they won't multiply. These private groups are doing the work that should be done by the national and local government units but they get no help from them. They survive on donations.

So, what I'm saying in a roundabout way is: This Christmas, don't think only of your human friends and relatives. Think also of the animals that can't talk but can feel. After all, the Lord Jesus was reminded by many animals in His manger during that first Christmas long ago. They are as much a part of Christmas as the Three Kings and Santa Claus.

Bear can you give gifts to animals? Donate to PAWS and Cats and other animal welfare societies. Your donations will be used to care for the animals. You can give gifts to your friends by donating to PAWS in their names. PAWS will then send them cards saying that you have donated a certain amount to PAWS in their names. There's still time to do it before the New Year.

Or you can adopt an abandoned dog or cat. PAWS will see to it that they are neutered and in good health before giving it to you.

Dogs and cats are very affectionate and loving pets. They will return double the love and care that you give them. Give them a Merry Christmas and you will have one, too.

Tradition and popular constitutionalism

WHEN THE JUDICIAL AND BAR COUNCIL earlier scrapped the interviews of nine judicial aspirants because of purported misdeed, especially when it concluded with regard to how to choosing a chief justice, the argument for the "tradition" of candidacy was not weaker.

The commissioners Vicente V. Mendoza, a retired Supreme Court justice and noted constitutionalist, Antonio Eduardo B. Nachura, argued that the so-called rule of seniority in appointing chief justices has no firm basis in history or tradition. Half of our past chief justices, he says, were not the most senior when they were appointed. He cites Chief Justices Florentino Feliciano, Manuel Araullo, Ramon Avancena, Jose Bello, Felix Makasiar, Ramon Aquino and, under Cory Aquino, other eminently had been recommended by the Judicial Bar Council.

Mendoza says that this is the first time that seniority has been argued customarily and the appointments of Antonio Carpio and Renato Corona as chief justices. Mendoza says that "there is no law or rule to prevent the President from considering other factors like merit and leadership," in particular, the nominee's appreciation of issues on which the Court and the nation are involved. Felix quotes the chief justice-designate Reynato Puno as saying that "seniority is not enshrined in the law but in the majority and the decisions are built on the majority and the decisions are built on the basis of their decisions. Only then can the Court address its jurisprudence, which is not a strong point on coherence but a shared discourse on what makes truly matters.

Critics say that the seniority "rule" has been followed into tradition by successive presidents and their nominees to the Court from justices. If so, I wonder why these same critics also say that the executive president has done he produced a politicized judiciary.

When a Richard Nixon, John Roberts was appointed from outside the Supreme Court, and was, thus, the student he just made decisions to denote the direction of the Roberts Court, which now I envy for the Philippine Court.

The same chief justice-designate Puno, under Aquino Salonga, his law dean at the Ateneo University, and whose prestigious law firm he joined upon graduating cum laude. When he resign became Senate president, he invited Pangalangan to serve as his counsel in the Senate and in the Liberal Party.

Dictionaries of governance and economics prefer the term "crony capitalism" to describe a case where Larry Kramer calls "popular constitutionalism." In the 1935 constitution decision, Pangalangan empowered the people—not the courts—to interpret the presidential duties through the democratic process. Not the people, through their elected officials, make their free choice as to the lifting Ass cum, he said. "The Constitution should be read in broad, life-giving strokes," and gave the politically accountable branches "sufficient discretion...to enable them to respond to changing circumstances [while] asserting for our people...the blessings of prosperity" we conferred. "In no one Court knows how functionally and unnecessarily."

Significantly Pangalangan concurred in invalidating provisions during the same time he was teaching constitutional law at the Ateneo. Puno, now chief justice-designate, Justice Reynato Puno. In Tatad v. Secretary of Energy, Puno likewise cited the Commission—and, emphatically not economic politics—and held that the Oil Industry Deregulation Law perpetuated the monopoly of the oil giants. Pangalangan also joined Puno's forceful dissent in the Manila Hotel case, where the Court used a strained reading of the Filipino First clause to allow the losing Filipino bidder to match price but the winning bid.

Conversely, Puno has joined Pangalangan's position in Romulo, wherein a perpetual election winner was removed each time for being an alien but finally regained citizenship before another election day. Pangalangan said: "Time and again, the Court has held that the people's choice is the best gauge of fitness for public office." Puno called it a "path-breaking pronouncement...which is pro-people and protects the integrity of legalistic. Upholding the sovereign will of the people which is the 'in all' and the 'for all' in democracy, is even more a fundamental that will endure time and its tempest."

Beyond thinking on governance, Pangalangan is however unsystematic on social questions, such as in upholding those ordinances that are deemed nonextensive but not its social acceptance. Significantly though, citing the 19th century-drafted family code, he broke the decades of psychological indignity as a ground to nullify marriage.

At last and best, in dissent, that the Bonds Penalty Law is unconstitutional because Congress failed to "state with specificity" "compelling reasons" and "heinous crimes," the only exception permitted under the constitutional ban on capital punishment. He has actively applied the new approach set forth in Escobedo and its progeny. We cannot "condemn law-breaking in the name of law enforcement." Or any exception, he boldly says the powers of the subjugation to strike down the Executive's congressional supervision.

In Marcos v. Gonzales, where the majority allowed Imelda to run despite her questionable "residence," he dissent insisted that "a narrow way of interpreting the Constitution [can] subvert its [or] common meaning [as understood] by the common people...to cause unjustice story is."

Pangalangan has not hidden or reversing certain positions, and hands Roberts' stage where: The Court "must not stop to connect and give us clear, bright future's further guidance." but rather must "take no chance for life...to the end, succeed or fail, the fight is on, and challenging best is the best hope of your client."

Columnist: rcpalangan@gmail.com

Two economies

(Concluded from Wednesday)

THE HIGH INTENSITY CRISIS OF THE Government of President Macapagal-Arroyo during the first quarter of 2005 did not confirm the worst fears that a would paralyze the economy. Although key governmental social on the brink of collapse, July's zero-fiscal-deficit target was only moved to ground. Still the gross domestic product slowed to 4.1 percent in 6th to September, down from the 6.2 percent in the same quarter last year. Disappointing economic officials who underestimated the economy's resilience.

Thus the economy did grow, if only slightly, despite political uncertainty prompted the government's claim that it had finished the economy from political turbulence. But independent economists said the 4.1-percent growth was "not good enough."

What the economic estimates highlighted was the deep dutch-absorption capacity of the economy against the disruptive power struggle of the political elite, including both administrations and opposition elements.

The economy's resilience is good of its relative independence from the country's political upheaval. Its inherent capacity to rebound is not new. It was the case in 2001, when the country's economic stability and the economy has not rebounded immediately by the foreign business and investment community. They have applied some "learning points" with the implementation of tough anti-terrorism legislation and the Balikatan exercises, the economy quickly and the strong inflow of overseas workers remittances during the past six months.

These inherent socio-economic resilience that up prevented social illnesses which should surely accompany the continuous fall of the President's legitimacy rating, despite the good news about the peso's rally and the latest remittances.

The paper of professor Ted Hill of the Australian National University which was released the other day, offers illuminating insights for understanding of Philippine politics and economics which he

ANALYSIS

Amando Doronila

nicely described as the possible emergence of a "first wall" that insulated the economy against institutional crisis from the front of political conflict.

According to the paper, "there are really two economies" in the Philippines. "One, where the 10 plus talent is able to demonstrate its skills at home, and increasingly abroad, is thriving. The other, where this talent is stifled by patronage politics and domination bureaucracy, is underperforming."

To the former "realizers of success," able to operate independently of government interference, or requiring little by way of complementary policies, the Filipino can be a highly competitive. Examples of this dynamism are big facilities in export processing zones and a wide array of service activities in areas as diverse as IT, call centers and medical support.

"What is wrong here?" the paper asks. For the Philippines to be restored to its rightful place as a leading East Asian economy, four key requirements are necessary.

"First, a resolution of the fiscal crisis. This requires a substantial increase in government revenue. It is dangerous willing to assume responsibility and pass certain fiscal measures, major reform of the tax code (i.e., the country has one of the highest corporate tax rates in East Asia but one of the lowest revenue yields) and broadening a culture of tax compliance and honest collection. Only then will the government have the capacity to deliver fair and equitable growth."

The paper argued a more concentrated strategy that "will make redistributive policy a good deal easier" is more than the mining sector. "An assembly does down for the past two decades by MNCs across, but a new heart on life."

In this regard, the draft of constitutional amendments submitted by the Constitutional Commission to the President, proposes the liberalization of the nationalist provisions of the 1987 Constitution. The proposal would open up certain areas now closed to foreign ownership.

Pertinent discussing the merits of these proposals, it is important to note that the focus of investment of the business sector is sharply different from that of the political class. The political sector is concerned over control of the economy, as shown by the parliamentary system and, especially constitutions, that allows his terms to complete her elected term until 2010.

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"Third, the debilitating conflicts in Mindanao, and elsewhere, need to be resolved. The recently released Philippine Human Development Report documents the terrible social impacts of the conflict, especially its dire socioeconomic legacies in Muslim Mindanao.

Fourth (and this is very relevant in the light of current developments and coup plots), "the military needs to be kept in the barracks. The longer the conflict in Mindanao continues, the longer the military is woefully under-funded, and the longer the political impasse persists (and with it, unpredictability), the greater the temptation for 'warm-up drill', the less likely is social reform and ambitious sections of the military will be warranted.

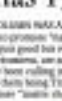
Hill says "this is by no means an impossible ambitious agenda." He cites the presidency of Fidel Ramos, from 1992 to 1998, which delivered on most of it, "and the country prospered as a result."

"Hopefully, President Arroyo has always five years (four is if she can complete her term)," he concludes. "She should be able to implement the pressing issues will largely determine how future historians judge her."

Christmas 1945

LAST FRIDAY, MY COLLEAGUE MAGARET SON SIT SIGHT was over holiday gifts to promote "Native Chic"—the idea that local products aren't just good but very good and, if we want to please our fellow countrymen, are actually more chic.

Some friends have been calling it to say they appreciated the reminder, one of them being Tita Silda Cordon-Bernardo, who asked for more "native chic" exhibits. Here I am (almost) never say no to Tita; I thought of tapping on that first article while we're still in the holiday season.



PINOY KASI

Michael L. Tan

For today's column, I'm going to pick up on Tita Silda of native chic, emphasizing the need to buy local as a way of building not just economic but also social capital.

1.68

My column last week suggested, strongly, that we might want to avoid Initiative Declaration shopping, even if, admittedly, to avail of a really, really cheap. Shortly after I did the column, I read that the Bureau of Internal Revenue raised 1.68 and found that 3 out of every 1.8 souls there were reading Inquirer. Thus, the Inquirer's revenue soared 168, right?

Not quite. Frankly, considering the way our taxes are used (or misused), 168% tax evasion isn't my main reason for boycotting it. My problem with 168 is that previous foreign exchange gave rise to the importance of those goods, and I'm being told here, using the word "importation" (there's a lot of smuggling and/or underpricing at Customs) to describe it.

The capitalists are translated Chinese (and, lately Koreans). There I as the distinct made doesn't stay rolled, except for the policy wages (and/or the sales clerks. Well, there are various than the money does stay in the country as Fund less than subsidiaries manufacturing services in the municipality. Otherwise, I have to many of our Philippine, as it wasn't gross or local.

Afraid, 168 doesn't help the country and may even be doing great harm. An income really because "168" is derived from the Chinese's love of magical numbers: 168 means "the road to prosperity." But 168 also means "the road to poverty."

The explanation is warm, capital crisis generates more capital. This isn't happening with 168's operations. At least the Chinese people sold in legitimate mall establishments helps to balance the economy through taxes (sort of) and new services for capital.

Social capital

But there's more to all this than loss of economic capital. For the country to move forward, we also need social capital, which consists of knowledge, skills and values that are passed from one generation to another. Like economic capital, social capital is also "reproductive" or "expansive."

We lose both economic and social capital with our addiction to imported stuff. Certainly, the fate of the "imported" is universal, and certainly we've been addicted to imported stuff for several centuries—even before the Spaniards arrived, there was a thriving trade with the Orient.

But the problem is that, in our current economic context, our addiction has grown to an unprecedented scale, to the extent that we are killing industries for local production. Why bother, or why pay any more money for those when you can just import them from China? What happens here is an erosion of manufacturing know-how and skills, the social capital better generations sometimes used.

Years don't just lead an artistic about how farmers makers were losing out to the cheap imported Chinese lights. Once makers saw how they're stopped producing some products here, made on those lessons. Why bother to even think of those designs for our locals. OK, so maybe paper Christmas trees are on their way out because of a catch on the internet, but that should only push us to more innovative Filipino designs for those cards.

The other night, I heard on the way to or from somewhere the OP Singing Ambassadors' "homecoming tuning" in the Bayanihan. I had a moment of nostalgia remembering how our school choirs were around caroling. That's disappearing, too, with caroling now cued by urban poor kids to extort money so they embark your car. "Sir or we haven't seen with our singing," is reminiscent of the kids in the old Christmas. Imagine how many of those songs are still being passed on.

The OP Singing Ambassadors does have some CD, "Songs of the Seasons," with their rendition of 21 traditional English and Filipino carols, explaining why they keep singing as many travels.

Building social capital doesn't mean sinking to the traditional. I read about a CD of Kapampangan carols, "Kalanu ning Pasku," composed by Crispin Castillo and sung by the likes of Moy Ienzil and Antonette Tuvo. Simply having cut-and-dry Kapampangan versions of Christmas songs is important.

But I haven't been able to find that CD in Manila. We need better marketing for so many of these products, and together with that marketing we need more conscious efforts to build on the "social capital" aspect. For example, the recordings would certainly be helped by translations for each of the songs. It was only yesterday, through Melinda Quintos's column, that I learned about "Bayugong Dalipdip" being composed by Felipe de Leon in 1935, a few months after the bombing of Manila that killed thousands of Filipinos. Christmas that year must have been haunting for the sadness, longing and hope portrayed in it.

Manuela's history of the song could not have been more timely because the night before I was listening to it on the Singing Ambassadors' latest CD. It's literally been one of my favorites and I suspect it will be for me, too. For now, I'm left to ponder humming the tune in Filipino's lullaby, dreaming of De Leon's peaceful night, and wondering about Christmas then something when Manuela's father, around Nueve Ecija and in search a colorful past, hopefully not made in Crime. It's a plain the lyrics to her, and who, remembering Christmas 1945, we may never give up on building peace, at home and in the world.

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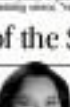
The 'King Kong' of the Season



AT LARGE

Rina Jimenez-David

ABOUT THE ONLY "RARE JESSE" FIGURE THAT survived the "massacre of the innocents" among my once-extensive Jesse collection is a fairly large ceramic "Baby Jesus," imported as he would be if lying on a crib in the manger. My daughter gave me this figure, but we've always had a problem with displaying this "Baby Jesus" because he's much larger than all the Nativity figures we've had and never all by his lonesome, until on something Father's Day in St. Joseph's, placed him in manger.

But with all of my Nativity scenes missing a "Baby Jesus," I figured I'd make up for the infant's absence by placing the big "Baby Jesus" in there with the rest of the cast. So for the infant's absence in all the other fellas.

Where my daughter was able to charge this year of the Yuletide decor at home, save the lonesome baby Jesus, was in the area of the smaller manger scenes, she exclaimed: "Mom! Why did you put the baby Jesus? He looks like King Kong among the fellas!" To which there could be no response, and of course, "Aww, him!" So, apparently, he looks like King Kong of the Season?

And there, dear readers, is how desperate and delusional columnist find subjects for their columns.

I remember a homily included in Bishop Soc Villegas' book of reflections in which he sought to remind the faithful about who the center of the entire Christmas celebration is—or should be. Using the example of a family with a small manger scene

Medalists deserve foreign treat

I CAN SEE NO REASON WHY NEAL Cruz, in his Dec. 12 column, should question the decision of First Gentleman Mike Arroyo to treat our medalists in the South East Asian Games to Hong Kong Disneyland.

These athletes are ordinary mortals, just like most of us, they are only too willing to grab a rare opportunity to travel abroad, an opportunity which, for some of them, will only have a once. This is not... I repeat, this is not... in the sense of the First Gentleman on a whim of Cruz. This is an honest opinion on the matter.

I agree with Cruz: there are many iconic spots in our country that are worth our time and money for the adventure that our public riders and citizens who can dig deep into their pockets should consider these tourist havens in support of the Department of Tourism's "Wow Philippines!" and who can argue with that?

But while some of them may have extraordinary support for tourism, most of our athletes come from humble beginnings. In the past, for them, going abroad would only happen in their wildest dreams. Anyway, because they live in the Philippines, they would have more opportunities to see the country's tourist spots.

These heroes rendered us hard to give our country its first overall championship in the SEA Games and they deserve even a vacation, here or abroad, and it does not matter to us which one they get to "see" first.

As Cruz wrote in his column, in fact here to all the Disneylands as well as to other theme parks in Florida and Canada. Why deny these athletes the opportunity to see for themselves and compare the beauty of our tourist attractions with those of other countries?

—JEZUEL BALLARAN,
Intramuros

LETTERS

Garcillano provided lesson on clutzpah

THE WORD "CLUTZPAH" IS THE only word with which we can aptly describe former Election Commissioner Virgilio Garcillano's performance at the House of Representatives.

For those unfamiliar with the word, the love exposition of its meaning was given by the lyricist Sammy Cahn. He said: clutzpah was characterized by the man who murdered his parents and then, when he was charged with the crime, threw himself at the mercy of the court on account of his being an orphan.

Garcillano provided an equally appropriate example when he claimed he was unable to answer previously requested the wife tapped tape as it was subject to a legal proceeding due he had initialed.

Clutzpah!

—PHILIP U.D. LUNES,
Block 11 Lot 5, Calle Lapidario,
Nova Vista Village,
Lanang, Davao City

Clouds over Christmas

INQ7 readers are in on the ugly, unsolved face of the Philippine civil service, especially in the Christmas season.

"MERRY PHANKSGIVING! HAPPY PHANKSGIVING! HAPPY PHANKSGIVING!"

That was from an ugly, burly Filipino responsible for stamping my passport. I supposed he was from the Bureau of Immigration. Looking at him with extreme loathing, I could see the pile of dollars on the table he was using. You can just imagine what I wanted to do to him.

Three weeks ago at a presentation of Secretary Rhonda Bataala to reassure the Filipino community in San Francisco that everything was going to be all right in "Perlas ng Silangan," Joaquin Limpad-Gaco, a popular community leader, told Bataala that she LOO of us people at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport. It was too scandalous to be printed.

Another gentleman told Bataala of his experience in Iraq with "executioners in uniform" who were asking him for "pamasko" in a threatening tones.

What could Bataala say? The right hand does not know what the kleptomaniac left hand is doing?

All these lovely "pamasko" greetings and stories of Filipino expatriates who have been propping up the Philippines with $13 billion in remittances are getting around the blue sea.

Kay Bataala dyan, ha. Pa-make-"el Negrito"—Grand Terrace, Richmond, California

* * *

The moment you're back in the Philippines, you feel you have to hold your belongings close to you. These immigration people and airport personnel in uniform are as arrogant and contented, asking you blatantly for all kinds of things, especially money and cash if you are only coming for Christmas season.

It's like no other airport in the world. In Frankfurt, Bonn, Amsterdam, Melbourne, Singapore, Hong Kong, Thailand and Malaysia, airport personnel are very cordial and courteous. If you know something elsewhere, it will be to our benefit to you before you notice it's missing.

It is so disgustingly different at the Manila airport, especially when you are traveling with foreign friends. I tried very hard to convince my foreign friends to spend their scheduled holidays in the Philippines, even e-mailing them about the beautiful scenery in www.bisnduforjesus.com), and telling them how they could communicate directly with the folks, including little children, in English.

A Philippine immigration officer once held up my Australian friend Michael Cozens for two hours for no reason, just chasing tourists. Where, those immoral immigration people!

Maybe we will progress some day after we realize that we have to discipline ourselves and be vigilant about others who are undisciplined. I'm very hopeful that good leaders will arise soon to settle very simple issues like this.—Ric Capistrano, Victoria, Australia

* * *

The entire of the Bureau of Immigration, beaming its employees (from saying "Merry Christmas") to the Ninoy Aquino International airport Terminals 1 and 2 is quite commendable, considering that the practice of greeting incoming travelers from abroad "Merry Christmas" has become a practice every Christmas season.

For Filipino travelers, the perception is likely to be that the immigration personnel are expecting a "gift" to return. Foreigners simply greet back.—Nestor Fiasco, Quezon City

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VOICES ON INQ7.NET

Across the NATION

Assistant Editor Tony Bergonia

PNP says 'jueteng' back in Quezon

By Leiza A. del Puerto, Jr. reporter
and Delfin T. Mallari Jr., INQ Southern Luzon Bureau

THE POLICE YESTERDAY CONFIRMED GOVERNMENT anti-jueteng czar Edward Hagedorn's report that the illegal numbers game was back in Southern Luzon.

A task force had been sent to three towns in Quezon province to go after "jueteng" protector officials said.

The police learned that operators were trying to hide the illegal numbers game by emulating the draws in the Manila lands—away from the town centers.

"These are reliable reports. When your men] got to the province, there were people collecting [bets] downtown like bumabalik [customers would come down from the uplands]," said Chief Supt. Antonio Nuñez, head of the police's anti-illegal gambling unit.

Nuñez did not identify the towns they were checking because it could spoil ongoing anti-jueteng investigations.

Action sought

"[The operations] are not done in the politicians [town centers], but in outlying villages. They conduct the draws in the hinterlands. I have a team from Camp Crame [sent there] to pursue and follow up," he said.

Such news reports on jueteng resurgence, Nuñez said he was hoping the regional directors of areas ruined by Pastor Wilmon Bitpet Bagcalzar would act.

The national headquarters had already asked ground commanders in Luzon to confirm reports of jueteng, Nuñez added.

As of 2 p.m. yesterday, the police have yet to receive a report.

"We have not yet received [their] report," said Deputy Director General Avelino Razon Jr., who is deputy chief for operations [DOO] and Nuñez' immediate superior.

Razon said the police's "one-strike policy" was in effect. Under this policy, a police chief automatically gets sacked if the national anti-illegal gambling unit successfully busts a gambling syndicate in his town or city.

Denial

But the police chief of Quezon province denied that organized jueteng operation has resurfaced in the province.

"That's not true. We've been quite successful in our campaign against organized jueteng operation. What we have here in the streets gathering bets were collectors of 8[2] lotto, which is legal," said Senior Supt. Victoria Caccam Jr., Quezon police chief.

Operatives from the Anti-Illegal Gambling Special Operation Task Force based in Camp Crame raided a suspected jueteng drop site in the barangay of Barangay Batitis and Bagumbungan in Tagkilan but found no illegal gambling operation.

Supt. Joe Crisóstomo, Pagbilao police chief, said the raiding team conducted the surprise operation without coordinating with the local police force.

"Apparently they aimed to catch unguarded jueteng employees. But we've been trying hard to keep the town jueteng free," Crisóstomo said.

He said the Camp Crame operatives led by one Chief Insp. Warlimin Mercado investigated the village chief of Silonay, Miguel Talusan.

"The barangay official swears to the group that jueteng had already stopped in his place two years ago," Crisóstomo said.

Caccam said he would immediately order all municipal police stations to conduct strict monitoring on the possible resurgence of jueteng operation in their respective areas.

STREET PLAY
While doing market errands, these two boys torture a plastic container box into a body cruiser, as the public market in Baguio City

Gov't vows to issue more ancestral land titles to claimants

LA TRINIDAD, BENGUET—THE National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) has vowed to be more aggressive in the processing and titling of ancestral land claims of the country's indigenous peoples and communities.

Jannette Serrano, NCIP chair, said the commission's thrust to speed up the issuance of ancestral land and ancestral domain titles was inspired by the current constitution on Charter change and the landmark Carino [Isnayan] that was validated and supported by the United States Supreme Court.

The NCIP, she said, is hoping that the constitutive commission on Charter changes created by Presidents Macapagal-Arroyo would strengthen the ancestral land and ancestral domain titles and not undo any proposal that would harm indigenous peoples' rights as provided in the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (Republic Act No. 8371).

Serrano was the keynote speaker of the general assembly of indigenous women leaders in the Cordillera at Ifu Benguet State University here on Friday.

"We will accelerate the delineation and titling of ancestral lands," Serrano said. "We would like to see to it that when Charter changes are done, we are already on board together with ancestral domain titles."

In the last three months, she said the NCIP had signed for the issuance of eight Certificates of Ancestral Domain Titles and one Certificate of Ancestral Land Title.

Serrano said the NCIP had always respected the Carino Doctrine, which recognized the ownership of ancestral lands by indigenous peoples.

The doctrine was explained by the US Supreme Court in 1909 in the case "Mateo Carino vs Insular Government of the Philippine Islands."

The US Supreme Court, through Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, accepted Carino's "possessory title" over 140 hectares of land in Benguet which his family had used and occupied even before the Americans and other colonizers came. —Bebiar Tarabia, INQ Northern Luzon Bureau

Kin of Leyte landslide victims remember tragedy

By Joel Arriaga
INQ Visayas Bureau

BAUKO ISLAND, SOUTHERN Leyte—Despite rites marked the second anniversary of the killer landslides that hit three sites on Bauko Island on Dec. 19, 2003.

The tragedy which killed more than 100 people, was commemorated with a Mass on Monday celebrated by four priests. It was followed by a brief program preceded by flower offering and candle lighting at three sites, in San Ricardo at Barangay Pintic, San Francisco at 2 p.m., and Barangay Poblacion in Bauko at 4:30 p.m.

Southern Leyte Vice Governor Leyte attended the rites with the officials of the affected towns.

Except for Libaan, where the Mass was held at the town's parish church, the commemorations at Pintic are [3] reported killed and missing) and Punta (89 killed and missing) were held in the areas where the tragedy struck.

Compared to last year's rites, the ground has thinned down, partly due to typhoon Yolanda, which left 20 people dead and missing, which was observed with no surviving relatives attending the Mass.

"We know that this is not a happy celebration, but we thank you for remembering your loved ones who are happy where they are now. Thank you for linking your relatives with the communities of what happened two years ago," said Abejo as parish priest Fr. Apolo danced as his homily during Mass at the tragedy site.

The Mass was held in the chapel destroyed by the 2003 flood which has since been rebuilt.

After the Mass, San Ricardo Mayor Virginia Mejia led about 50 people in lighting candles at the markers for the victims erected in front of chapel.

'Lumad' folk spend holidays in Davao

DAVAO CITY—HUNDREDS OF lumad (members of the indigenous communities) have descended to the city since November.

But unlike in previous years when many residents here maintained an indifferent attitude towards the traveling lumad, their experience this year is far more pleasant.

The reason: Mayor Rodrigo Duterte had asked them to come and share the spirit of Christmas with city residents.

As early as the first week of November, members of the Mandaulo communities from the hinterlands of the city and from as far as Bukidnon became a regular sight in the city's streets, asking gifts, used clothing and money.

Duterte said during his Sunday TV program over MIO-GDS that he invited the lumad folk to come and spend the holidays in this city.

"Transportation was made available just for them so they could make it to the city," he said.

Unlike in the past when the lumad spent their nights under the mercy of the weather, Duterte said he made sure that this year, they had at least decent places to stay.

"Their place to stay and provision and other needs are taken care of," Duterte said. They were also given health and medical services. This was the city's way of showing appreciation and concern to the lumad, who are descendants of the first settlers of Mindanao, he said.

"You feel the joy of giving," said Barangay 3-A Chair Edgar Bugayo, who oversees the needs of the "visitors" encamped in his village.

Bugayo said aside from the gifts they would receive, each family would also be given P2,000 in cash.

The money would be drawn from the city's fund.

"I came here with my daughter and husband to ask gifts because this is the only time we at least can have enough rice to eat and have clothes which we don't have much in our home," said Rosanna Bulilan, an Ata-Manobo.

Rosanna and her family took temporary shelter at a gymnasium in Barangay 3-A in Bankerohan district.

Even if this shelter does not look a bit like home, there is a smile among the children.

"At home we only eat corn and kamote (sweet potato), but here, we could at least enjoy rice and viand," Rosanna said.

Narsito Andhi, 30, also an Ata-Manobo, said although Christmas is not part of their culture, they have gone out of their way to join the celebration. Davide Jay C. Ilarina, PIA Kilusang Bayan

Leyte gov't employees get incentive bonuses

By Jessy A. Gabieta
Phil Glimpse Bureau

TACLOBAN CITY—THE LEYTE provincial government is set to release this week around P20 million in bonuses to over 2,000 employees as their productivity incentive bonus for 2005.

Each of the employees will get at least P5,000 to P20,000, depending on the performance rating they received this year, according to provincial administrator Vicente Emano.

On top of the 2005 incentive bonus, the 2,184 provincial government employees will also receive P2,000 each, representing their unrealized incentive bonus for 2004.

But unlike the flat rate bonus scheme adopted in 2004, the amount to be received by the employees this year would be based on the performance rating survey ordered by Gov. Jericho Petilla early this year.

Emano said that since this satisfactory rating would mean that an employee could receive P5,000 as his productivity incentive bonus while those who performed very satisfactorily could receive as high as P20,000.

Under the rating scale adopted by the provincial government, an employee who gets less than 7.1 in performance rating will receive P5,000. A rating of 7.1 to 8.49 is equivalent to a bonus of P6,000, and 8.5 - P8,000. Those who receive performance ratings above 8.5 will be richer by P10,000.

All casual employees who started working in the provincial government after June 30 this year or after the survey was completed would receive P5,000 as their productivity incentive bonus.

Emano said those who received less than 7.1 performance rating were employees representing just about six percent of the Capitol's 2,116 workforce. This means that majority of the employees will reach get a P6,000 bonus.

The bonus was expected to be released before today, Emano said.

He said among the factors considered in the performance rating survey were the employees' attendance, work ethics or morals, and compliance to the orders issued by the governor, like wearing proper office uniform and office ID.

HUNDREDS of Ata-Manobo, a proud tribal group living in the hinterlands of Davao province, descended to Davao City to serenade shoppers here of their unique song and dance in a hope to get holiday goodies. Jonathan Joel C. Cabling

Gov't radio station in Kalibo gets bomb threats

KALIBO CITY—AN UNIDENTIFIED caller threatened to kill grenades in a government-run radio station in the capital town of Kalibo in Aklan last week saying fears of continued attacks against journalists.

The caller threatened radio station dyRO of the International Broadcasting Corp. and said three grenades will be lobbed at the station's compound on the eve of the 60-Aklan festival next month.

Reporter Valentino dyRO station manager, said their technician Joel Atienza received the first call at around 2 p.m. on Dec. 16. This was followed by another call two hours later.

He said the caller mentioned his name and their reporter Arjee Reyes and dare reports on criminal activities in the province.

It around 3 p.m. on Dec. 16, a caller that sounded like the one who called the station two days earlier, he told Aklan that he would lob grenades at the station on Jan. 11.

"He even told our technician that it would be the biggest news during the festival," Valentino told the reporter in a telephone interview.

Reyes went on to the station where the calls came from. Valentino reported that they contacted the 61 criminal groups for data consummation against illegal gambling in the province.

Supt. William Macaraeg, Aklan police director, said they were investigating the case and were determining the possible motive and the probable suspects.

The police have increased patrols in Batan per Agdipis where the station is located, he said. Rainer H Burgos Jr., PIR Mayon Bureau

National Food Authority
Regional Office 1&2
Barrio, Dagupan de Oro City

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

LOT NO.	DESCRIPTION	ESTIMATED VOL. (MT) or AREA in sq. m.	ESTIMATED NO. OF BAGS OR PACKAGES	ESTIMATED WEIGHT PER BAG/ PACKAGE (KILOS)	PACKING (PP/J/C, etc.)	ESTIMATED COST (PhP)
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						

ACTIVITIES	SCHEDULE	VENUE	TIME
1			
2			
3			
4			

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Couple feeds Laguna poor every Christmas Day

CALAMBA CITY—A COUPLE HERE, WHO requested anonymity, has been feeding the "poorest of the poor" families in Laguna for about 10 years now.

The couple started distributing food items for needy barrios in a barangay in Calamba City sometime in 1995.

The husband-and-wife team expanded its Christmas needy barrios giving to Victoria town and this year, it is sending food items to the poorest folk in Pangil town.

The couple coordinates with priests and nuns in preparing the gift packages.

They choose the four nice grains, which they give away together with spaghetti, canned food and other food items needed by very poor families to celebrate Christmas.

The couple prepares at least 200-300 bags of food items.

The lawyer-husband used to remind his friend-priests or nuns in beneficiary areas not to discriminate against the benefactor because of his or her religion.

"During Christmas let us remember that Christ loves the most neglected ones even if he/she is not Catholic. Let us feed those who are very hungry," he said.

The donor businessman must have been vividly aware of Christ's words in the Scripture that says: "Whenever you did this to one of the least, of these my brothers, you did it to me" (Mt. 25:40).

He said it makes them happy to be a part of alleviating the hunger of so many families even if only for a day.

He said they know what it feels to suffer and be hungry when they themselves became fire victims in 1994.

The husband, a lawyer, said they were doing this without fanfare to thank God for the blessings the family has received.

Particularly, the couple is thanking God for the recovery of the loans they incurred during a big fire in Calamba City market on Dec. 21, 1994.

Almost all their commercial outlets in the city, filled with stocks in preparation for the New Year, were reduced to ashes in that fire, the husband recalled.

He said his wife had a nervous breakdown because of the huge damage that they suffered in that fire.

Although they and their only daughter came out alive from the disaster, the wife had almost given up hoping they would recover from the ordeal right.

But the husband, who was trained in a Catholic university in Manila, said he kept telling his spouse that there was plenty of hope.

The couple then embarked on a "trial and error" scheme to bounce back from the setback and in their business.

After a few months of praying, crying and experimenting on various options, the couple finally found the answer to their predicaments when they acquired a property, which became the foundation for their renewed business venture.

"I really believe in the power of prayer," the husband is frequently heard saying to his friends. *Reynaldo G. Panay, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

ROUNDUP

Most rape victims minors

ILIGAN CITY—Three of four victims of rapist Reginor Cresmo this year were minors, Misamis Oriental Police Provincial Office here showed that of the 83 rape cases reported to the Women and Children Concerned Desk (WCCD) from January to November this year, 49 were minors. The report also showed that five of the rape cases with children as victims were incestuous. PO2 Philomela Jakaq, acting WCCD chief, said there were 16 cases of acts of lasciviousness and eight attempted rape of children. "The total number of crimes against children in the province reported to WCCD during the period was 161. *Jimmy Amoranto, PDI Visayas Bureau*

Militiamen hurt in clash

COTABATO CITY—Three militiamen were wounded in an encounter with Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) rebels in Pagalungan town in Maguindanao on Saturday. The militiamen are under the operational control of the Army's 603rd Infantry Brigade. Rebels said the militiamen attacked their member Eid Mosalma and his followers in the outskirts of Barangay Pantaonan. Mosalma is also the village chief of Pantaonan. "It will not affect the ongoing talks. The incident stemmed from land conflict," said Command. *Jaelthy Glaiben, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

Japanese found dead

SIBUGAY, SOUTH CITY—The Japanese national who went missing here about two weeks ago was found dead in Polanco, Davao del Sur. Senior Supt. Antonio Torrecampo said Yutaki Sakuda was slowly strangled. Found near the Japanese national's canteen on Dec. 11 was a tie wire, which was used in killing him, according to forensics. He said the victim identified the cadaver based on Sakuda's photo, copies of which were distributed to police in southern and central Mindanao. Sakuda, who was in the tuna business, arrived in General Santos City on Dec. 7 along with another Japanese, Yohichi Sakuda. *Agustin Z. Cenit, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

Firecracker blast kills 1

CEBU CITY—A man working for an illegal firecracker factory in Barangay Bulog, Lapulapu City was killed when a drum containing pyrotechnic ingredients exploded. Marjun Bagate, 33, of Dapdap, Cordova, was walking along the road to Purok Ramos, Barangay Bulog when the explosion happened, according to Lapulapu City Police Chief Supt. Louie Dajao. Initial investigation showed that the drum was owned by a certain Dioniz Casa who allegedly accepted sub-contract deals to make firecrackers from fireworks fragile, aviation illegal firecracker maker in the area. Bagate was declared dead on arrival at the Lapulapu City District Hospital. *Jhanno Dipalkaya, PDI Visayas Bureau*

Indian shot dead

DUMAGUETE CITY—An Indian national was shot dead here late afternoon on Dec. 19 in what investigators suspected could be a vendetta killing. Police said Jaswant Singh, alias Lucky, 47, a resident of Calmon St., Sta. Pete and Paul Villa Subdivision in this city was shot dead by a lone gunman as he was getting from Cabinet Institute of Technology at Bunnagan, Dupon at about 5:15 p.m. after attending the Christmas party of his alma. The murder weapon, a .9mm low caliber wounds to his left arm and the nape, said Sr. Inspector Lee Jr. City police chief Supt. Romeo Angelo said Lucky was testified as the leader of a group of Indian nationals who clashed with another group of "Pambayo" of whose leader was also shot a month ago. Lucky's twin brother, Jackie Singh, was also killed by unidentified gunmen two years ago while collecting payments from his clients at Barangay Poroong, Cangguran, Bantayan. *Bobby D. Lozada, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

Busy Davao airport

DAVAO CITY—The Davao International Airport (DIA) remains the busiest airport in Mindanao with about 871,000 passengers served during the first semester of the year, the Mindanao Economic Development Council (MEDC) said. MEDC is, which is currently pushing development programs to Mindanao and monitor the island's economic growth, said 53 percent of passengers boarding by an external Mindanao through the DIA while the Lumbia Airport in Cagayan de Oro City had a 15.15 percent share or 356,351 passengers are not during the same period. *Jody Jaclan, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

Coal mine firm faces suit from victims' kin

By Norma Nayalicar
PhilStar Visayas Bureau

CEBU CITY—FAMILIES OF MINERS killed in the Dec. 10 coal mine explosion in Dalaguete have planned to sue the Bukang Kasadyahan Development Corp. (BKDC) for damages.

The plans to file charges against the company were aired during sessions of safety lapses raised by one of the sons of the victims.

Alejandro Bandiel, 21, son of Jaime Bandiel, one of the entrapped miners whose body was one of the three retrieved Sunday, claimed that inspectors of the Department of Energy (DOE) did not inspect the mine hauled allegedly because they were bribed by the Visayan coastal firm.

Alejandro claimed the mining company did not follow the regulations of a 28-meter distance between wooden cribs or blocks inside the tunnel.

Alejandro said BKDC's mine cribs were supposed to be 28 meters apart between mines, which he claimed was risky in case of methane explosion because it would have a domino effect on the other blocks inside the tunnel.

He said he would file charges against Bukang after the burial of his father.

Relatives of other victims said they would also decide the possible filing of charges against BKDC after the burial of their relatives this weekend.

DOE-Visayas regional director Antonio Labios, however, denied allegations the agency's inspectors had been bribed so that BKDC could continue its operation despite its alleged failure to follow the safety guidelines inside the tunnel.

Labios stressed there is no standard distance between the wooden cribs, saying other coal mines were adopted the 5-meter distance.

Labios said he understood that relatives of the victims were in grief and were blaming the mining firm for the accident.

But he said Bukang did follow safety standards, which was the basis for granting the firm its coal operating contract.

Labios, however, said the coal mine will remain closed even after the retrieval operation because of the pending investigation of the Dec. 10 explosion.

Dalaguete Mayor Ronald Alin Cesario said the body of Francisco Pinlac, 43, from Barangay Dumlan, was recovered by members of the rescue team led by Cebu Provincial Fire Marshal Supt. Ambrosio Cunhar and the miners of Bukang.

Cesario said the rescue team was still conducting retrieval operations in order to dig up the bodies of two other miners—Gregorio Bandiel, 58, of Alabyan, Dalaguete and Manuel Lenogan, 40 of Cantandilao, Dalaguete.

Cesario said the body of Pinlac was found in between saturday and sunday 10.

He said the rescue team was conducting clearing operations at 1:30 a.m. at the tip of the 490-meter tunnel, where the bodies of Bandiel and Lenogan were believed to have been trapped.

HOLIDAY RUSH
Just like others, this wheel-chair bound man joins the Christmas rush to buy groceries for "noche buena." Despite his disability, he is often seen in the streets of Puerto Princesa City, bringing smiles to everyone.

Indigenous folk seek transparency in free trade talks

BAGUIO CITY—REPRESENTATIVES of Cordillera indigenous peoples have urged government representatives in the ninth ministerial conference of the World Trade Organization last week in Hong Kong to be transparent on the agreements reached in the meeting.

"We do not want to wake up one morning to news that our government had sold our country in the WTO. We hope that the government would tell us about the agreements made [in the WTO conference] because we do not want our farmers to be displaced [in the global market] and run nowhere remembered," Windel Bolinget, secretary general of Cordillera Peoples Alliance, said in a letter he co-Wednesday.

Bolinget said agriculture would always remain a contentious issue in the WTO as long as local farmers are disadvantaged in the global trade.

He said farmers, especially those in the major vegetable producing towns in the Cordillera, suffered losses when imported vegetables flooded the market due to trade liberalization.

Guilt

Virgie Dumlao, a member of the farmer's group Agri-Tabo, said farmers who joined the International Peoples' Tribunal during the WTO protests on Dec. 13 in Hong Kong found the WTO "guilty" for destroying agriculture in developing countries and endangering food security.

Myrna Bangan-Gawo, secretary general of Innabuyog-Cordillera, said testimonies from farmers and fisherfolk from Thailand, Hong Kong, Mongolia, Indonesia, India and the Philippines during the protests held at the WTO's ministerial conference in Hong Kong showed that the mass cited were the introduction of imported seeds, fertilizers and pesticides by agribusiness industries from the United States and Europe, the displacement of farmers from their ancestry-of-origin/fishing trends, and the displacement of villagers due to large-scale mining.

Liquidated policies

"We are convinced that the farming poverty in the country and absence of jobs for Filipino workers and professionals are a result of liquidated economic policies and programs of Philippine government [that are] biased to the interest of foreign corporations and businesses and to institutions [that foster] globalization and WTO policies," a statement from the Cordillera Migrant Workers said.

"We are calling on the Philippine people to get out of the WTO. The gap between the rich and poor countries is getting wider with global powers taking over the [developing] countries' resources," Bolinget said. Beatrice Dalisan, *PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*

Order to end contracts on trees gets flak

By Rory G. Amurao
PhilStar Visayas Bureau

SORSOGON CITY—A PETITION of at least 34 people's organizations to the governor are protesting the order of Environment Secretary Michael Defensor to cancel several Community Based Forest Management Agreements (CBFMAs) in the province due to low or unsatisfactory performance.

In an undated resolution, the Tree Planters Federation of Sorsogon Organizations of Interest Inc. (TPFSOI) said the trees planted CBFMAs by the government beginning 1995 claimed that the order was unconstitutional.

The group added that the order was "incomplete, disregard of due process" as CBFMA" added was funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 1995, in connection with international covenants and treaties.

The resolution said it is forwarded to Defensor and to the Office of the President. Its signatories included not only those whose CBFMAs were canceled but also those who were not affected by the order.

Defensor issued a memorandum dated Nov. 30, copy of which was received by the Community Environment and Natural Resources Office (CENRO) here last Dec. 10, instructing the Department of Environment and Natural Resources Central Visayas (DENR-7) to order the cancellation of some 33 CBFMAs covering about 9,000 hectares in the provinces because of "unsatisfactory performance" and "rampant violations of illegal logging activities."

CBFMA is a tenurial arrangement issued by the government to people's organizations for them to protect, develop and preserve the trees in forestlands areas covered by the agreement.

In return, CBFMA holders get 75 percent of the proceeds of the trees that will be harvested from the area. The remaining 25 percent goes to the national government.

The agreement covers a period of 25 years and renewable for another 25 years.

The 33,000 hectares CBFMA area in the province used to be a reforestation project in German Negros, which received P150 million from Asian Development Bank and German Economic Cooperation Fund, now called Agency for Technical Cooperation.

AIR FORCE personnel burn their hands ball in their rescue mission in Mindoro.

Mindoro execs rush repair of dikes

CITY OF CALAPAN—THE PROVINCial government said it will start the rehabilitation of the 1.4-kilometer dike in Sitio Bolbok, Barangay Nicolas Cruz, Dec. 22 "to relieve the flood waiting in the city and neighboring town.

This developed after Gov. Rosan C. Panaligan met with Department of Public Works and Highways 1st District engineer Jovy Sierra, provincial engineer Elmer T. Dilay and representatives of concerned agencies on Tuesday.

Panaligan ordered Dilay to prepare the necessary assignment for the rehabilitation of the dike.

The provincial government will use its own funds for the project.

Dilay said the project cost will amount to P8 million, if the cost of repairing the 16 breaches and over the dike will be included.

The next move, he said, will be the rechanneling of the Bucayao river with a cost of P5 million, which was pledged by 1st District Rep. Rodolfo G. Valencia from his congressional fund.

It will be implemented by the DPWH and will start on Jan. 15.

The third step will be the construction of a permanent in mouth near year at the Mc. Aglubang Mt. Bridge river junction also in Mt. Bridge where it is estimated that a big volume of water flow down to the the cause river at May manning bring river.

The DPWH has scheduled the road to reach P65 million. Some P5 million will come from the initial release of the National Disaster Coordinating Council.

Meanwhile, the National Irrigation Administration will make a 451-meter gabion retaining with a height of eight meters from the water bottom and will be at the riverbank level.

It is estimated to cost P32 million, P10 million of which will be released this month for the 200-meter initial construction. The balance of P22 million will be released next year.

According to engineer Wilfredo Salazar, the gabion retaining involves the placing of stones in formed wire with the size of "1 x 1 x 1" meters and with a height of eight meters.

The wall strengthen the river bank against possible erosion of the soil under the dike during strong river flows.

It will be recalled that more than 300 meters of Bolbok dike were destroyed by the strong river current in Ulo city on Dec. 7 as a result of continuous rain from Dec. 5 and the flash of water from the mountains.

The provincial government immediately repaired the destroyed 300-meter portion on Dec. 12.

The dike was being repaired when typhoon "Quedan" hit the province on Dec. 17.

The Task Force South composed of personnel from Bureau, Aniel Foundation and Mirant's Project Movement came to Calapan early morning yesterday and distributed relief goods to 4ampm and Baco town.

About two truckloads of goods amounting to almost P1 million reached Calapan at about 7 a.m., said Benjamin Abadiano, newly-installed president of Aniel Foundation and coordinator of the assistances. Rhodenne T. Flavia, *PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

Nuns help prove new rice breed healthier

BAGUIO CITY—THE LATEST magic bullet to combat malnutrition has the blessings of Filipino nuns. In fact, they were inside the test subject of a new study showing the effectiveness of iron biofortified rice which was also developed in the International Rice Research Institute.

The study by a team of Filipino and Swiss researchers and published by the American Society of Nutrition in the Journal of Nutrition showed that the body can indeed absorb the iron in this variety of biofortified rice.

The IRRI developed IR68144 3B-2-2-3 through conventional breeding techniques. Described as high-yielding, the rice provided 17 percent more dietary iron than the local varieties tested.

The rice variety is expected to fight iron deficiency or anemia which affects mostly women and children in developing countries.

Anemia does not only stunt children's mental and physical development but is reported to be the culprit behind the death of 50,000 women who die during pregnancy or childbirth because of the severe lack of iron in the blood.

Anemia prevalence

The fourth Report of the World Nutrition Situation published by the United Nations Standing Committee on Nutrition (UNSCN) says iron deficient anemia is the most prevalent nutritional disorder affecting more than two billion people in developing countries and is most common among women of reproductive age. It is estimated that 52 percent of pregnant women in developing countries are anemic.

The UNSCN report also said the world as lives doubled if the iron fortification rice can indeed be stored in the body.

So study can determine the process that could help the United States distributed Nitrogen Institute's iron biofortified rice variety known as IR 64Fe while the other was grown the biofortified rice.

The nuns who ate the iron biofortified rice had a significantly higher iron levels in their blood than those who took ordinary rice. Jerome Cruzado, *PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*

'Silahis ng Pasko' . . .

From page A1

thought of that project," he said.

He also produces the annual spectacle, which the city's outstanding opera achievements are given due recognition.

Sunshine

Silahis ng Pasko remains Bulacan's most dazzling project because he has managed to keep a healthy sense of humor about it.

"I am not gay, OK?" he declared. "Silahis' means 'radiance of the sun,' but I have gotten used to the jokes. I am old-fashioned, so 'silahis' to me means 'sunshine.'"

Padilla said the project was basically conceived as a March civic, a banner parade and multiple concerts simultaneously dazzling residents and tourists alike.

"I produced a living Christmas tree—the first of its kind south of Manila at the time," he recalled. "I encountered a great wanting platform on which a large choral group stood to form a Christmas tree. And they sang beautifully for the best and richest of Baguio."

Padilla said this confluence of activities occurred decades before city businessmen gave full backing to the Panagbenga Flower Festival in 1995, essentially to also woo tourists back to Baguio.

Low gov't support

That was the first and last time Silahis were this much glamour.

"It suffered from low government support, and I felt it was my duty to keep it going. But to do that, I had to keep it humble," Padilla said.

He said Silahis had been kept afloat by a group of friends in the business and political communities.

"I had to pawn my camera at one time to finance some of the gifts of Silahis. I felt bad (that I had to resign bottom), but it was my obligation to keep it running," he said.

One day this month, contributors from Baguio's community of the disabled shared a merger meals in between such races until Good Samaritans began putting coins and P500 bills into five-day pots, which the children broke that same afternoon.

"That's how Silahis survives—from the city's good soul, from the bottom of my heart," Padilla said.

Recall of EO creating energy superbody urged

From page A1

Bonjour del Asi Rep. Prospero Pichay said the President was "ill-advised" in issuing Executive Order No. 474, which created the Strategic Oil, Gas, Energy Resources and Power Infrastructure Office that would be headed by Energy Undersecretary Peter Antonio Abaya.

"The President . . . was ill-advised. If they think Popoy Lotilla is not fit for the job, then why not find a replacement?" Pichay said.

The University of the Philippines Law Center's Institute of Human Rights also denounced EO 474 as an attempt by Abaya to usurp the powers of his boss.

"Using a so-called strategic oil ban, he (Abaya) wants to usurp powers from his own boss by dragging the unsuspecting President along with it," Jeffrey J. Rodon, a research associate of the institute, said in a statement sent to the bureau.

But Abaya is unaffected by all the flak he has been getting since Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita announced his appointment as Wednesday.

"I will not step on anybody's toes," Abaya told the reporters in reaction to speculation that the newly formed agency would encroach on the powers of the Department of Energy, Philippine National Oil Co. and Power Sector Assets and Liabilities Management Corp. (PSALM).

Pichay said creating a superbody to take over most of Lotilla's functions might result in "duplication of functions."

'Not as strong'

Abaya said his critics were fussing about nothing, pointing out that the agency was not a superbody at all.

"It's not going to be as strong as the DOE. (In fact, it will have fewer functions than the DOE has now," he said.

The EO says nothing about taking over the PNOC's role in developing oil and gas resources or the PSALM in privatizing power generation and transmission assets," he said. "It will just promote and assist in fast-tracking the implementation of private sector-led projects."

Abaya said the new body would also work the "operational programs" for the energy crisis plan, in tandem with the DOE.

Although the department has its own Philippine Energy Plan, Abaya and his office would be more focused on short-term solutions.

'Bureaucratic layer'

Critics lambasted the oil and energy superbody as an "unnecessary bureaucratic layer" that has only left industry players and prospective investors more confused about the government's focus in the energy sector.

Pichay said he was not aware of the reasons behind the order but said it might be related to the privatization of financially troubled National Power Corp. (Napocor).

He said he had called for an investigation of Napocor's privatization since the giant power firm was selling power generating units to dubiously accredited oil companies at almost in the Epira law (Electric Power Industry Reform Act).

"The EO should be recalled and the Palace should assign somebody who can do the job," Pichay said.

Since the energy secretary had already filed a letter of resignation, the Palace should just accept it, he said. "If he has a resignation letter, then they should find a replacement instead of reserving an

GMA donated . . .

From page A1

pursuit or, the donation made during the launching of the reforestation Visaya Abaya in August.

He was upset that the report might undermine the value and wisdom of the Bonda ng Pinoy an additional program intended to avail people to help the poor through regular savings of at least P5 centavos daily. The fund supports a feeding program and livelihood micro-projects for the poor in the Manila diocese.

Defining the problem

"It's not about the money," Bautista explained. "The problem is the outlook, the perspective, the conscience of the people (toward the poor)."

Critics questioned the timing of Ms. Arroyo's contribution, which came less than a month after the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines released a pastoral statement declaring its refusal to join calls for the President's ouster but advising her not to ignore charges against her.

Asked about Ms. Arroyo's possible motivations in giving the donation, Bautista replied: "Whether it came from the devil, it didn't (get) to me."

'Un-Christian'

Bautista described as "un-Christian" the conclusion of viewers and their possibly honest conclusions, stating the Gospel (reading on Jesus walking and dining with such individuals.

He also suggested that media should be interested, not in "weapons in making a list," but in "sharing the truth."

"I would want to elevate your profession to something higher because you're talking about truths," he said. "It's your calling and it's almost like a vocation."

Bautista asked that media be more objective "without becoming guilty" and without ignoring accounts of "real, injustice or lies."

"If I were a journalist, I would not accommodate my ideas into what I listen to (or) not hear," he said.

"I say this to my brethren-priests, too. That you preach not your ideas but the ideas of Christ."

Mayor's face glows . . .

From page A1

lampposts along Edsa in his city.

The specially designed *parol* (lantern) has generated curious reactions from local residents.

"I thought only the image of the Baby Jesus could be mounted on a parol," Fey Rosas, a cigarette vendor near the Monumento Circle, told the Inquirer in Filipino.

Married Ingle, an Ilchester supporter, said the lantern with the mayor's picture looked "nice."

Reached for comment by the business last night, Echiverri explained that instead of writing down his message, his face was being displayed as the "Merry Christmas message."

Gift to residents

The lanterns were a gift from the local government to the residents, said Alvin Feliciano, head of the city's press information office.

When asked about the expense, Feliciano said: "Half of the cost was donated by private individuals while the other half was paid for by the city."

Former Caloocan Rep. Edgar Erice had only dragon for the lanterns for use for mayor in 2004 and lost in Echiverri.

"The mayor's photo could be seen everywhere—as if Christmas was all about him and not about the birth of Christ," Erice told the Inquirer in a phone interview.

"They would say political rivals deprive the people of Caloocan of well-to-resort freebies, I have made it my mission in Caloocan. Avoid my inducements or (Be-) Forming to Caloocan," Echiverri said.

Power theft?

Erice also accused Echiverri of "possible power theft" and urged Meralco to charge the mayor with violating Republic Act No. 7832 (Anti-Electricity and Electric Transmission Lines/Materials Pilferage Act of 1994).

"He has illegally tapped Meralco lines with his promotional lanterns. This clearly evidence on using power lines," Erice said.

He added that the city paid Meralco a fixed amount for the power consumption of every bulb in a lamppost. Any connection aside from the bulb is considered "pilferage."

"A check with Meralco (showed that) the city owes P5.1 million in unpaid electric bills for above seven months," Erice said.

He said local officials who "committed and colluded" in the pilferage must be included in the complaint.

Echiverri denied the charge of illegal tapping of electricity.

"There was prior arrangement with the Meralco Caloocan Mall about it(with). The local government of Caloocan will be billed additional during the Christmas season—a 20-day period when the parols are connected to the lampposts," he said.

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Holiday road diggers face sanctions

By Leila B. Salaverria

CONTRACTORS VIOLATING the permit's long ban on road digging in Metro Manila will have a difficult time getting a permit in future projects.

According to Rolmer Lula, DPWH-National Capital Region information officer, the sanctioned firms will be penalized for failing to finish their damaged for the last concrete covers problems.

"There are no hard and fast rules on what the penalties should be on those who go against the ban. But if we see (it), perhaps we could deny the violators' requests for future permits," he said.

Traffic jams

He also said the ban was supposed for a good reason, to minimize traffic jams during the holidays—and should be followed strictly.

"Since a minor road excavation is enough to affect the traffic flow, and the excavation got angry at us. This is why the ban should be followed by everyone concerned," Lula added.

The DPWH, as well as the Metro Manila Development Authority, implemented a moratorium on road excavations in the metropolis earlier this month in light of the increasing volume of vehicular traffic.

Exception

Only emergency work, like those involving public utilities, would be allowed to push through.

The DPWH has work on Jan. 16.

Lula added that with the recent suspension of the Unified Vehicular Volume Reduction Program (UVVRP), which is expected to further increase the number of vehicles on the roads, there is a need to ensure motorists that no service vehicle affects traffic flow as much as possible.

The UVVRP, or number-coding scheme, restricts cars from major thoroughfares once a week depending on the last digit of their plate numbers. It is usually suspended from Monday to Friday, but was suspended starting this week.

New case against ABS-CBN

By DJ Yap and Jerome Aning

RETIRED/RESIGNED EMPLOYEES OF broadcast giant ABS-CBN's news department have filed a class suit against the network for allegedly unfair dismissal, labor secretary-advocate legal basis.

In their complaint with the National Labor Relations Commission in Quezon City, broadcaster Gene Gutierrez and eight others sought reinstatement, moral and exemplary damages, 14th and 13th month pay, vacation and sick leave credits, among others.

They said the network violated the Labor Code when it declared their positions "redundant."

They alleged ABS-CBN hired replacements on a contractual basis, negating the redundancy argument.

Dequina said the "gut claim" workers they signed their lawsuits there from seeking employment with competitors of Lopez-owned companies for one year after separation were "unjust, unreasonable, unfair."

Though ABS-CBN declined to comment on the new case, early this month it denied charges of illegal dismissal.

"ABS-CBN categorically states that no former reporters and employees who filed cases... accepted an early retirement package and received the necessary benefits for their years of service," the network said.

The other complainants were news correspondent Ruweza Dequina, news production manager Norma Susanna Cortez, executive producers Ana Maria Federman and Jose Mario Pedroche, GMANews correspondent Wilfredo Perez Jr., desk editor Michael Isidro and Ms. Antonia Isidoro, and field production head Gilda Panaga.

Named respondents were ABS-CBN president Eric Quizon, programs and content affairs chief Maria Sereno, radio division head Jesse Mercado, human resources head Philbert Berba and Mark Byamonte.

The employees' counsel, Jose Jamero, said many provisions of the Labor Code were circumvented because instead of now-workers, present employees were displaced.

Jamero said his clients also questioned the legality of the quitclaims waiver they had signed.

Bike cops collar 2 suspected thieves

By Jocelyn R. Uy

THE BIKE PATROL IN SAN JUANICO Intelligence Unit worked well this week.

The SF Police Bike Patrol, created recently to beef up security inside the subdivision, collared two alleged members of a "Bahay Kubo" gang.

Police identified the suspected thieves as Jerlito Lumbantao, 22, and Jayson Catangal, 19, both residents of Bethlehem Street in Barangay San Isidro.

The alleged theft happened at 3:00 p.m. on Dec. 13 in front of the Vito Cruz Motor Station on Aguinaldo Avenue. The SF Bike Patrol saw the suspects opening the glass window of the motor station's green Honda pick-up with plate number RTF 127.

The two allegedly took the cell phone of delivery boy Philip dela Peña. The police arrested the suspects and recovered the phone.

It was found out later that a accused of crime for Lumbantao and Catangal.

"I commend the members of the SF Bike Patrol for their quick apprehension of these two thieves...," Major Florencio Bonaldo said in a statement.

The local government, despite opposition from security concerns from members of the homeowners' association, had opened to motorists the subdivision's 10 Granada and Aguinaldo Avenue to ease traffic on these roads.

HI-TECH CAROLING
Singing Christmas songs for motorists on Roxas Blvd., Pasay City, this teacher-and-student team dresses their act with the help of recorded instrumental music.

A family's 16-year Christmas 'tradition'

By Tarra V. Quismundo

FOR 16 YEARS NOW, HILA ZAEL and her children have made it a tradition to ask for gifts from employees at the Makati City Hall, underwood by closed doors and crowded parking lots).

Dressed yesterday morning, pajamas suites, Hila' namyo mamang namudo, si Ita' Pablo ang tradition on dog nasoo ang mal for some para mangkor

pr. Ita as long as we could, we would ask for Christmas gifts for us or ang, a 17 96 just need the pats to do so [," said Cael, 43.

The mother of four and her family could hardly raise the money for their daily needs.

Her husband is out of work. Cael earns some money doing laundry for other people.

"This has been our practice every Christmas since the birth of my first born son, Christian, who is now 16. At least we would have money to buy food for Christmas, and to buy clothes and shoes for my children," Cael said.

With sons Carlo, 8, and Ethan Jo, 5, Cael was at the old Makati City Hall at noon yesterday, hoping to collect more cash from employees.

She and the kids arrived on Dec. 14 from her hometown, Bolinao, Binal, and are staying at a cousin's house in Barangay Guadalupe Viejo.

Though armed many by seven ty guards and employees several times, Cael and seven daughters aged. Besides, she said, it was a profitable enterprise.

"In a day I would earn between 1000 to P5,000. On lucky days we get 19000 to P7,00. But in the past, we got as much as P13,000 a day," she said.

So far, she was able to earn 9000 for her efforts, Cael said.

MetroBriefs

Not for real

A TV personality was arrested on threatening members of a band members in Quezon City, police said yesterday. Timothy Mark Cigarmanis (known as Mark Gil), actor, son of actor Mark Gil, allegedly attacked Miguel Alvarez, 24, a member of the rock band Chicos Sici, outside a bar on Kalayaan Avenue in front of the Museo de Manila University campus. Both the manager said it was likely a case of "a may dala" (alcohol-fight), which should be easily settled by both parties. Alvarez said the attack might have been aimed at his former girlfriend who is now Cigarmanis's current partner. The alleged victim told police he was sightseeing his friends at about 11:00 a.m. when Cigarmanis, 37, accompanied by a girl, approached them. He actor allegedly began hitting Alvarez in the face and head, but was later pacified by friends. —Leila B. Salaverria, DPCI Habitual Crimes Office Station 10, Police said physical injuries charges were being readied against the actor. But Cigarmanis's manager, Ricky Gallardo, expressed confidence that the matter would be settled out of court. —DJ Yap

Scent gave him away

ONE SECOND TV quarry sharp sense of smell led to the arrest of a suspected drug user outside an upscale neighborhood in Makati City at dawn yesterday. Operatives of the Makati Police Department's Station Anti-Illegal Drugs and Special Operations Unit (SAID-SOU) were conducting anti-illegal drugs operations in Barangay San Antonio when Police Senior Inspector Jose Mendez Layad, 25, noticed a cop car smoke allegedly smoking marijuana within the premises of Greenhill 2 in Ayala Center yesterday. Mendez and Police Senior Inspector Rolando Ilustrisimo approached the group, quickly frisked up as he approached. But before he could get close, the man threw away the cigarette, and there ran in different directions. Ilustrisimo managed to catch up with Layad who was immediately turned over to the SPD-SAID. —David C. Zulueta

'Spellbound' in Manila

"SPELLBOUND," America's famed magic show, is coming to Manila in time for the holiday season. The show consists of three unique specialty acts, an ensemble of 14 dancers, and of course, lots of magic to leave audiences breathless and spellbound.

Wizards enchanted will surely be enthralled by this month-marathon performer which opens on Dec. 21. The show is at Cuta Theater pendulum with the participation of Ramon Eurosario and Family and the Amateur Catalogue. Tickets are available at Ticketnet (911-5555) (6738) Digital Grand Slamm and the theatre box office.

Metro mayors get chance to play Santa

INSTEAD OF THE USUAL GIFT bags of toys and candies, more than 40,000 elementary students in Muntinlupa City received instruments and handbooks from their city government this Christmas.

Mayor Jaime Fernando went around the city's 17 public elementary schools for two weeks to distribute the 200-page English-Filipino pink dictionaries. The students also got copies of private student handbooks, also colored pink.

In Muntinlupa City, more than 45,000 poor residents lined up for orange pails full of groceries from the city government yesterday. Muntinlupa City Mayor Aurora Gonzales II distributed the pails filled with uncooked beef, meat, sardines, canned, sugar, milk and coffee. About 20,000 residents of Valenzuela City, on the other hand, received bags of groceries for "a simple, made basic fruit," according to Mayor Sherwin Gatchalian.

The activity would also be an opportunity to interact with residents during the yuletide season, the mayor added. Edwin Bacasmas and Marie C. Carvajal

3 fires leave 1 dead, hundreds homeless

By Jocelyn R. Uy

A SEVEN-YEAR-OLD WOMAN DIED and hundreds of families lost their homes as a result of fires in two depressed areas and a commercial establishment in southern Metro Manila in the past week.

The first fire broke out in a two-story boarding house on St. Paul Street, Lopez Village, Barangay San Isidro, Muntinlupa City shortly before 7:00 p.m. Wednesday, 6964 residents Catchalian told the Inquirer yesterday.

Casualties

About 50 families were left homeless and damage was estimated at P200,000.

Meanwhile, the investigators said Benita Ojilo, 90, died in a fire that razed a squatter colony on Tramo Riverside corner Virata Street in Bajac City at 9:10 p.m. Wednesday.

The family of the late William Ilonzo was unable to save his body when the fire quickly spread to the area where a wake was held for him.

About 400 families were left homeless and some P15 million worth of property went up in smoke. Some fire victims sought shelter in a nearby church and a school on E. Rodriguez Street.

Faulty wiring

Another blaze that started at 12:01 p.m. yesterday destroyed a two-story commercial complex on National Road in Barangay Poblacion, Muntinlupa City.

Damage was estimated at P1.4 million.

Arson investigators suspected faulty electrical wiring as the cause of the fire.

The Daily Gospel

Friday, December 23, 2005
4th Week of Advent

1st Reading: Mal 3:1-4,23-24
Gospel: Luke 1:57-66

When the time came for Elizabeth, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the merciful Lord had done a wonderful thing for her and they rejoiced with her.

When on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, they wanted to name him Zechariah after his father. But his mother said, "Not so; he shall be called John." They said to her, "No one in your family has that name!", and they asked his father by means of signs how he wanted the child named. He asked for a writing tablet and wrote on it, "His name is John," and they were very surprised. Immediately Zechariah could speak again and his first words were in praise of God.

A holy fear came on all in the neighborhood, and throughout the hills of Judea the people talked about these events. All who heard of it pondered in their minds and wondered, "What will this child be?" For they understood that the hand of the Lord was with him.

Commentary:

Back in Elizabeth and Zechariah and the birth and naming of their child. His name is John as the angel commanded—it is time to obey the Word of God. And in obeying Zechariah's tongue is loosened and he begins to speak again by praising God. This child is consecrated to them, but it was the beginning of the hand of the Lord to work them. What is your name? What does it mean (John is believed of God)? It is time for you to obey the word of God! And as parents do you remember that your children have been entrusted to you but that must be about God's work in the world? God's hand is always with us now.

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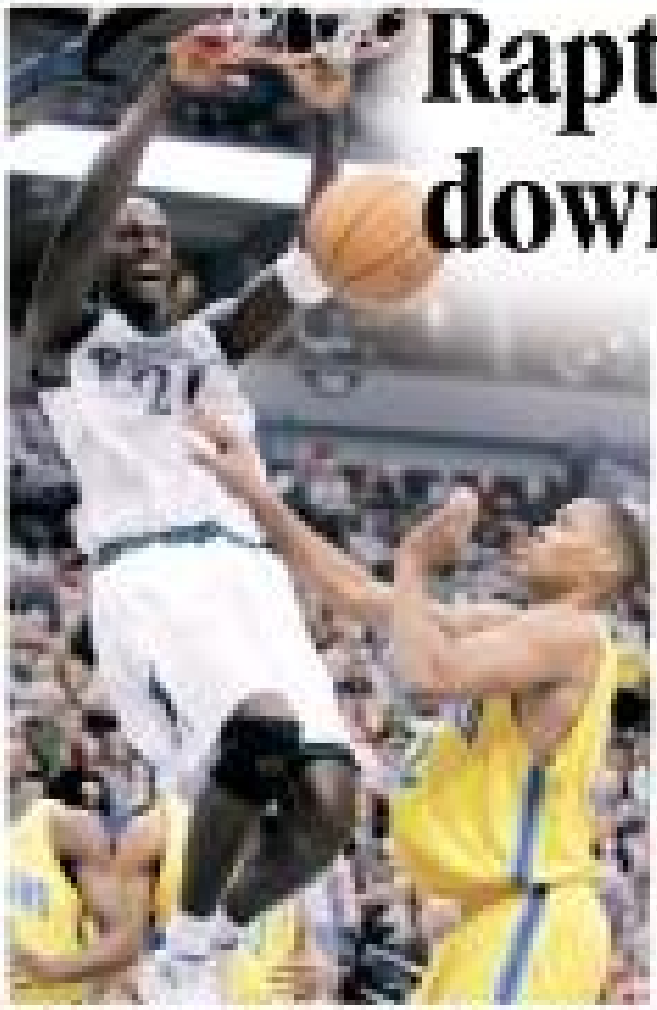
Raptors shoot down Rockets



MINNESOTA's Kevin Garnett (2) defends over Ryan Gomez' Fly Brown during their NBA game in Minneapolis, Dec. 21. Minnesota won. AP

NEW YORK—Mike James scored 29 points and Morris Peterson had 24 points and shot down Yao Ming and the Toronto Raptors whipped the battered Houston Rockets, 94-83, on Wednesday at the Toronto Center.

James, a former Rocket who was drafted by Houston, Octobre provided the offensive spark for the Raptors but it was Peterson who made the key contribution defensively limiting the Cindy to just seven points.

Chris Bosh contributed 17 points and eight rebounds for the Toronto center as the Raptors won for just the sixth time this season, three of those coming on the road.

"Yao is a great player but we wanted to make it very, very difficult for him," said James. "He (Morris) had a lot of pressure with all the responsibility from

"After a while all that pressure can begin to weigh on you.

"Mike Miller came big for us with a new start and Devin Anderson, Jon Barry and Rafer Alston shrinked with various amounts, the Raptors forward drew some fire on McGrady, double-teaming the Rockets' star all Star at every opportunity.

In Philadelphia, Allen Iverson tallied 34 points, eight assists, six rebounds and three steals as the 76ers beat the Golden State Warriors, 111-100, to snap their 10-5 skid to seven games. Reuters

Complete results

PHILLIES (PHI 11 Golden State (GS) Jackson (J), 10 Raptors (T) New Jersey (NJ) Dragon (D) Sacramento (SA) 10 Kings (K) Boston (B), Jazz (J)

NBA Sports will air the Dallas-San Antonio game live from the Alamodome starting at 11:30 a.m. today.

2 Vietnamese soccer players in SEAG match-fixing mess face lifetime bans

HANOI—TWO VIETNAMESE PLAYERS accused by alleged match-fixing during the recent Southeast Asian Games in the Philippines could face lifelong bans if convicted, a top football official said Thursday.

The national Under-23 women's leading striker Pham Thi Quyen and midfielder Le Quoc Phong are accused of receiving cash from betting networks in order to arrange some results in what is now as the worst crisis gripping the game in Vietnam in the past 30 years.

"The two players could be suspended for life if convicted in a court of law," said Vietnam Football Federation president Nguyen Trong Hy.

"As of now they are banned from the national V-League in 2006," the professional championship due to start in January Hy said.

National coach Alfred Riedl of Austria expressed shock over the developments.

"I am even more shocked that the Vietnamese people by the name of 'Pham Quyen' and 'Quoc Vuong,'" he said. the Tuoi Tre daily from his home in Austria, where he is holidaying.

The SEA Games draw participants from all of Vietnam's partners in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Nine Vietnamese players have been questioned in connection with the investigation into alleged match-fixing.

Vietnam beat Myanmar 1-0 after some Vietnamese players appeared to slow down their play. Police are also investigating allegations of an attempt to fix another match with Malaysia, which Vietnam won 3-1. AFP

Anybody's game

CORRECTION. In my last column, the name of Manila Rep. Juliet Lopez was missing from the paragraph which should have read this way: "In the ark of living experience, I am appealing again to the members of Congress, particularly Bacolod Rep. Monico Puentevella, a former PBA commissioner, and Manila Rep. Juliet Lopez, brother of former Philippine Sports Commission chair and Manila Mayor Mel Lopez, to consider filing a bill for athletes with disabilities just like RA 9064."

BY THE TIME THIS GOES TO PRESS the San Mig Coffee PBA Fiesta Conference is only a day away. I expect the teams to go for broke in this weekend's games at the Cuneta Astrodome.

A delectable doubleheader awaits the fans today when seven-time All Star Ronnie Magsanoc faces his brother Coca-Cola Tigers, who will be playing minus suspended import Omar Thomas in the opener, while slumping Talk 'N Text handles reinforcement Sam Mitchell there in the nightcap. Crowd favorite Barangay Ginebra faces the always dangerous Alaska in a late game on Christmas Day to wrap up the classification round this weekend.

Sporting 6-7 records, pre-tourney favorites FEU-Red Bull, Alaska and 4G23 Express are locked in a tight contest near the end of the eliminations. The Purefoods Chunkee Giants with a 9-4 slate and Talk 'N Text with a 9-4 slate are also in the hunt for the last two semifinal slots. The Purefoods Chunkee Giants with a 9-4 slate and Talk 'N Text with a 9-4 slate are also in the hunt for the last two semifinal slots.

"It's anybody's game," said a PBA declared. "Every team will be playing with much intensity because the results carry much weight. The teams are now more competitive since reinforcement Mel Bala already knows the chance to return to the format where victories in the eliminations round are carried over to the quarterfinals and semifinal series."

According to Red Bull coach Yeng Guiao, his team is ready. But what he added that's once more were the finished winning attitude and the usual support provided by franchise owner George Chua and team manager Tony Chua.

"We lucky in many ways," the 47-year-old Guiao said in an interview, stressing that his import and Red Bull's new players are blending well with the marketing duo including Dan Villanueva, Lordy Tugade, Buddy Villanueva and Cyrus Baguio. Magnolia Juice, Powerade Canny

CLEAN LIVING

Ronnie P. Felipe

and Sugar Rocks have adjusted well with the other members of their new team," added Guiao, who was back-to-back Commissioner's Cup titles for the Purefoods franchise in 2004 and 2005.

REVELATION. Throughout the just-ended 22nd SEA Games competition, Filipino athletes performed flawlessly. One flawless performance came from billiards player Baldoza Azul, who won both the 8-ball and 9-ball gold medals in grand style.

In a post-tournament interview, the 20-year-old Azul credited her dominant form to the training program mapped out by billiards godfather Efren "Bata" Reyes, who, together with his older brother, former Asian "Bata" Reyes, gave the sport its overhaul support and recognition.

Azul, who is from Cebu, said, "My Bata played me against the country's top cue pros during my training. And that boosted my confidence."

In the Philippine 9-Ball Open, Azul went unbeaten in the qualifying round to become the first and only female player to make the cut in the main draw of any national billiards tournament to date.

"We have never seen anything like it before," said a beaming Efren Reyes, president of the Billiards and Snooker Congress of the Philippines, adding that billiards surpassed its previous best gold medal haul in the 2003 Vietnam SEA Games by winning a total of eight gold medals this time and becoming one of the most productive sports for RP in the 22nd SEAG, aside from aquatics, athletics, the aquatics sports of diving and swimming, boxing, traditional host wins, rowing, taekwondo, fencing and wrestling.

A BS Architecture graduate of the University of Santo Tomas, Azul is now eyeing the 2006 Women's World Pool Championship in March in Taiwan where she will be meeting stars with the game's greatest players like Allison Fisher and Karen Corr.

"Azul is ready," said her coach, Reyes boasts.

SPORTS
Text us your feedback: inquirer.sports@inquirer.net.ph
Editor Tobbyrick S. Melendres

PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo hands over three checks for P150,000 to diving's three-gold medal winner Rhoda Mae Perez during ceremonies in Malacañang yesterday. The President handed out checks totaling about P20 million to SEA Games medalists. /PCOO

THE PRESIDENT congratulates actor Richard Gomez and the rest of the national boxing team for winning five gold medals. /PCOO

President: Focus on 10 sports in Beijing

By Marc Anthony Reyes

AFTER THE 113-GOLD DELUGE IN THE RECENT Southeast Asian Games, the Philippines will now concentrate on 10 sports that will be heavily funded in hopes of scoring an Olympics breakthrough in the 2008 Beijing Games.

"Our budget must be focused on sports where we have good chances of winning our first Olympic gold medal," said President Macapagal-Arroyo yesterday before handing out checks totaling close to P20 million to the athletes who secured the first SEAG overall title for the country.

The athletes arrived just a few hours after returning from their Hong Kong holiday—a bonus promised them by Pres. Gen. (Ret.) Mike Arroyo, who raised, through his 911 Foundation, the fund they used to prepare for the SEAG.

Mr. Arroyo accompanied some 200 athletes to the three-day ceremony, including a visit to Hong Kong Disneyland.

Only a handful of athletes, however, will be given the honor of going for the Olympic gold in Beijing, with the President emphasizing hosting three times as the sport that is the most likely source of the elusive honor.

"Boxing must get more budget," said Rita Ocampo, who also commissioned archery, diving and taekwondo as Olympic-medal prospects.

Boxing came up with eight golds during the SEAG, four each from the men's and the women's bouts. The winners—Alex Ajan, Annie Albania, Anawim Chikiri, Michelle Kiamzon, Jeanne Magbanua, Nancy Sorongon, Joan Tipon and Josebet Tenorio—got P500,000 each.

Swimmer Miguel Molina, who is back at the University of California, Berkeley where he is an international relations senior, was the top earner with a total of P700,000. He took three individual gold medals and one silver.

Diver Rhoda Mae Perez came in second in terms of earnings, getting P250,000 for her two individual gold medals and a third gold she shared with Cecil Dennison.

Other big winners were swimmer Jessie Tolentino, one runner Rubilyn Amit and gymnast Noel Ramos with P300,000 each.

Billiards king Alex Pagulayan, now with his family in Canada, won P175,000.

The coaches of the winning athletes will also get about P30 million in cash incentives under Republic Act 9064.

Boxing official Roger Peñalosa expressed delight over the President's special mention of his sport, saying "this will surely inspire us to work even harder."

The President also urged the Philippine Sports Commission to be selective in sending athletes for training in China to make sure that the use the funds is maximized.

PSC chief William "Butch" Ramirez said he would ask the Philippine Olympic Committee and the national sports associations to demonstrate the core of the 113 elite sports which the country will concentrate on, aside from those picked by the President.

WHAT'S INSIDE
Easy outing for Barako; TNT-SMB tussle up /A26
Sa stars for Tagaytay B team /A27
Raptors shoot down Rockets /A26

Easy outing for Barako; TNT-SMB up

SEE BULL BARAKO GET A PLAYOFF SPOT for the second consecutive semifinal berth when they take on the inspired Iowa Coca-Cola Tigers today in the San Miguel Coffee-PBA Hoops Conference at the Cuneta Astrodome.

Coach Tony Cuneta and the Barako are heavily favored to win the 4:40 p.m. contest and clinch the second running 9-7 card of the ALEX with the Tigers expected to surely miss the suspended Omar Thomas.

Aside from the one-game lost, Thomas was fined P15,000 for a deliberate elbow on the head of Ormoc hoopster Ollie Lucio Sunday that opened an ugly gash that required several stitches to close as surgeon fluid is their game last Sunday.

Still 9-7 Iloz will also try to keep its hopes alive for the outright semis slot when the Phone Pals tangle with the San Miguel Beermen at 7:25 p.m.

The Beermen and the Tigers share the cellar at 6-10 and, if both teams lose, they collide in what may have called a survivor's duel to decide who makes it to the wildcard phase.

Under the present ranking, the Beermen are running No. 8, which means they need just one win over No. 9 in the survivor's duel to advance while their opponents have to prevail twice to stay alive.

With only the Christmas Day contest between Barangay Ginebra and Alaska left in the schedule, only the first semifinal slot was by the Formula Orthodox Game (3-14) has been established.

A four-way tie for the second slot is possible if Ned. Bull, Talk 'N Text and Ginebra win their last games.

Under this setup, the Barako and the Gin Kings would end up tabing the No. 2 and 3 slots based on the quotient system, with the Phone Pals and the Tigers finishing third and fourth.

Ned. Bull and Ginebra then collide in a playoff for the second semifinal berth with the loser settling for the first quarterfinal slot. Talk 'N Text and Alaska will move to another playoff with the winner seizing the second quarterfinal slot and the loser falling into the wildcard phase as No. 5.

The wildcard battle will have No. 5 facing the survivor of the No. 8-to-No. 9 duel, with No. 6 meeting No. 7 in the other pairing.

The two wild card survivors advance against the two quarterfinalists.

TAKE N' TEXT'S Willie Miller drives past Barangay Ginebra's Mark Macapagal during their game Wednesday. The Gin Kings won, 91-72. BOY SANTOS

On the wings of words

By Percy O. Dela

SQUINTED MY WAY TO THE BEACH front this morning. Still wedged between shame and disbelief, I resolved to be roused by the sun of the season.

Planned to wake up early to compose a sports commentary, though I didn't have a clue as to what to write about this first day.

COMMENTARY There's just days about words and how they "could take you to places so glorious and so far"—from an autobiography by a Pulitzer Prize winner—clicks in the mind.

Its how I am at the computer and not swimming. I should resign to some top spin on appropriate topic. The keyboard is an antiquity, pounding away an ode to sportswriters.

Sportswriters linking to a dead-end duo. Rhodes can do the family Actuna awards in his sweet and a pitch tabernacle. Involved down from one generation of sports scribes to the next.

With action words, sportswriters record versus with pens on blanking as dozen of war correspondents; or as moving and heartfelt as those of some sports writers—who can sometimes turn out a noble stories.

Sportswriters can be watched makers too, if they so please. There is no doubt about that. After all, they too lap up final scene, especially when important people display magnanimity in parcels of it.

But sports writers answers to a higher calling—to help reconstruct our dreams and victories through athletic competition. Sports often all serves as yesterdays for life.

Time for members of Congress with an ode to Pacquiao, our choice, sportswriters are, arguably the most wrecked segment of our community. They spin and wax the globe for what breakfast gives Jim Rackus calls "the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat" that stars our sports stars in the face.

Which brings us to the issue that inspired this piece.

If—sportswriters, words are indeed a gift of gold. Words are their way out, out of the mummy chat to. On the wings of words, they could go to faraway places or distant "that even your own his world only gaps at wonder and envy," according to this Pulitzer Prize winner in his book.

The book, as lucid a chronicle of how the author rose from a lowly police reporter to a New York Times columnist—reminds of a local scribe. While in his prime, the scribe was sent to America to cover a soccer tournament. He liked it there so much he stayed for about 10 years.

He's back from America for good. On the strength of words, he brings you this tribute to the sports writing community in general and to sportswriter friends in particular.

After all, friends as the comedian Jerry Seinfeld says—"are the DNA of success. They are the basic building blocks of life. If you have a couple of good ones, treasure them like gold. There's nothing better."

Merry Christmas to one and all!

Sports Notes: Hermie Rivera has good news for Lorna Isadora—Deborah. At long last, the former two-time champion has been given his green card by the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service. Now Hermie says Lorna "can come over and go after the crooks, to "keep the grimaldes" who refuse to pay her champion-ship money from eight years ago.

Alcantara advances to 14-under Masters

RISING STAR PHOENIX GARET ALCANTARA will represent the Philippines in the Asian 14-under Invitational Masters starting Dec. 30 in Melbourne, Australia.

Alcantara, the country's top 14-and-under campaigner from Cagayan de Oro, attained a total of 866 points from a series of 14-under international tournaments this year to claim the sixth spot in the elite eight-boy field. Eight girls from all over Asia also made the grade.

All the qualifiers will also compete in the Optus National Tennis Event in Sydney as well as the Ambassadors' Cup following.

Joining second-seed Alcantara in the boys' division are Sritaya Chanpet of Thailand, Indian Sushrom Sharma, Ronak Maniaj, Shreyash Mihani and Shrikant Pachapure, Tito Perdiz Fumerak of Indonesia and Abdulbasit Bronco of Syria.

Foreign stints up in LL elims

THE CHANCE TO REPRESENT THE PHILIPPINES in prestigious baseball and softball tournaments abroad will be up for grabs as the LBS League Philippines-wide qualifying series in five-day at Malaysia, Singapore and Pelayan in Batam Island on April 21-28 next year. Eighty-six teams have already confirmed participation in the eliminations, including 30 in the 11-12 years old bracket, where the winning team gets the chance to beat the PP 6000 in the Asian Giants tournament in July.

Pasay 4-cock derby today

COCKERS FROM NEW SOUTH CITY ARE EXPECTED TO converge today at the Pasay City Cockpit for the Christmas Eighter 4-Cock Derby which starts at 8 p.m. More than 60 fights are on tap in the derby which has Cagayanon Homebrew 1000 as exclusive sponsor. Top fights participants are vying in the event, according to host Ronald Ilo. All slots is a cash out of P800,000 for an entry fee of P12,000. For inquiries, call 851-0-90, 883-1-90 or 843-1000.

Coseteng pads Driver of Year overall lead

JUDY COSETENG PULLED TO TOP SPOT OF THE TWO-Asters last weekend but still padded his lead in the Driver of the Year race of the Philippine National Touring Car Championship 2002 at the newly-redesigned Subic International Raceway.

Cosenteng, driving for MRC Gtx Shotocon, wound up fourth and second in rounds 5 and 6, but still pulled away with 132 points in Group 1 of the series sanctioned by the Automobile Association of the Philippines.

Auto-brad Jose Panter of Team TEC Focus and Isuzu Fuentes of Petron Citron SRA, who was disqualified in Round 6, shared second place with 107 points.

Nelly Alawadia of AF Motorsports Malaysia the consistent Team was fourth overall with 92 points, followed by Carlos Ateneo of MP Turbo and Louis Fuentes of Petron Citron SRA with 74 and 68, respectively.

Then came Dennis Uy of Velocity Motor-Race Fuel Racing Team with 66 points and Gabby de la Merced of Big Mod Billards with 58.

With three legs or six races to go, organizers say the scenario can still change dramatically.

"It's too early to tell (who will top the series)," said PNTCC organizer and Race Boss Inc. president Richard Sarmiento. "Considering the intense rivalry among the drivers and crews, anything can still happen."

The Group 2 race is equally close with Senen Morales of SMC Racing, Wenwen Mendiola of Big Chill Racing Team and Miguel Lanaro of Velocity Motor-Race Fuel Team figuring in a three-way battle for top honors.

Despite engine problems in Round 6, Morales remained on top with 120 points, although both Mendiola and Lanaro were still in contention with 107 points.

Dominic Tan of Velocity Motor-Race Fuel Team was fourth with 64 points, followed by lady driver Marichu Francisco of Petron Citron SRA and Hugo Nieto with 62 and 58, respectively.

The last three legs are slated Jan. 25 at the Batangas Racing Circuit, and Feb. 11 and 12, and March 4 and 5, both at the Subic International Raceway.

IN COMMAND: Judy Coseteng

GOLD medalists (from rear from left) Telesisa Go, Maria Aeronette Nieto, Aurora Diane Alora, Sidne Marie Singson, John Paul Lizardo and Donald David Snider III with (standing, same order) VP for marketing Jose R. Campos jr., Petron chair Nicasio I. Alcantara, PTA VP and chief food solver Wang Sung Chun and Petron marketing services GM Josefito de Jesus.

Cash bonanza for SEAG taekwondo medal winners

VICTORIOUS TAEKWONDO JINS IN THE 23rd Southeast Asian Games have received additional cash rewards from kingpins sup-porter Petron Corp.

A backer of the national team since 1998, Petron recently gave out $75,000 each to the six gold medalists, $40,000 each to the five silver medalists and $20,000 to the lone bronze medalist who secured for the RP join the overall championship of the SEAG competitions.

These incentives were apart from the P500,000 fun cash gold medalists stands to get from the Philippine Sports Commission. The PSC is also rewarding silver medalists P50,000 cash and bronze medalists P30,000 each.

"More than the accolades that you have received, you have inspired our next generation of athletes to follow the same hard work, dedication, discipline and sacrifice," Petron chair Nicasio I. Alcantara told the jins during simple awarding rites at the Petron Mega Plaza in Makati.

"We hope that our continuing support of the national team, in cooperation with the Philippine Taekwondo Association, will encourage you to bring more glory to the country."

National coach Nedi Cabrini said proper moral support is a big factor in the jins' success, adding that Petron's financial support is "being used by the team for foreign exposure."

According to Commander Vi Candilas, Petron advertising manager the company has also been supporting football and beach volleyball.

Filipino taekwondo jins who bagged golds in the 23rd SEAG were John Paul Lizardo, Telesisa Go, Donald David Snider, Esther Marie Singson, Sidne Diane Alora and Mary Aeronette Nieto.

The silver medalists were Dat Alberto Morth, Michael Alejandrino, Veronica Domingo, Alexander Mendoza and Ma. Criselda Rosal. Sally Bello accounted for the lone bronze.

So stars as Tagaytay B tops team chess elims

Four rounds (four moves each)

4.0 points—Tagaytay City B, 12.0—SOA-Urbiztondo, Tagaytay City A, 10.5, 11.0—Malolos one, 10.5, Ilocos, 10.0—Dagupan Orange, Manila Orange, Sariaya Cargo Service, 9.0—Gumaca Coast, 8, Alabang, Philippine Navy, 6.5—Tagaytay Team, 6.0—Sariaya Rail Service Property, 5.5—Augusto Coast, 4, Davao Kidds, 0.5—Gumaca Sand, 0, 0.0—Sariaya rail, 0.0—Makati Youth

CHRISTMAS IS FOR KIDS, AND FOR Fide Master Wesley So, a 12-year-old chess whiz, he showed his elders that a nine-Christmas tournament is his turf.

So, the youngest titled player in the field, yesterday led lightly regarded Tagaytay City B of Mayor Abraham "Bambol" Tolentino Jr. to a 2.5, 1.5 victory over Sariaya Cargo Services and the top ranking after the elimination round of the Peoples' "Bambi" Pahay Chess Challenge in the Celebrity Sports Plaza in Pasig City.

So sampled veteran International Master Richie Gibayan on Board 1, while teammate Thomas Hermano downed Raymund Eubanks on Board 3. On Board 4, Allan Bituin settled for a draw against Perlora Villanueva to outdraw the foe of Edmundo Gatus to FM Jesse Neil Jalen on Board 2-3 and secure the win for Tagaytay B.

SOA-Cabiznas, led by former WP junior champion and National Master John Ted Cuenca, took the No. 2 spot following a 3-1 whipping of fellow finists of the Philippines B, 2-1.

Cuenca drew with NM Jamein Lydo on Board 1, rout as NM Rolando Andoko, also a former WP junior champ, lashed the joint against Jennel Cuenca. Jelael Mesorag and Dino Balbuser defeated the dumbing points for SOA-Cabiznas. Mesorag topped Carlo Magno Bautista on Board 3, while Balbuser turned back Noel dela Cruz on Board 4.

The No. 3 spot in the crossover series went to reigning national inter-elite champion Tagaytay City A, which labored a 2.5-2 draw against Pinoy Time Life.

Grandmaster Joey Antonio stopped fellow GM Mark Paragua on Board 1, while IM Otto Carma duplicated Antonio's feat by beating NM Oliver Barbosa on Board 2.

Jayson Lim and Christian Arroyo found the tie for Pinoy Time Life by posting win in the lower boards. Lim downed Jerry Atoque on Board 3 while Arroyo stopped Jason Perez on Board 4.

AFP A, led by IM Arnold Clebio, corned the No. 4 berth following a 3-1 dumping of Manila of Iran Corps.

Dalisay, the former Asian Junior champion, led AFP's cast with a win over NM Jovanie Ballos, while Allan Caminoja and David Elorta also won. FM Andrew Viaguia averted a shutout with a win over FM Ben Saludaga.

SOA-Cabiznas, Tagaytay A and AFP A actually entered tied with similar 12-point totals, but SOA-Cabiznas took the No. 2 spot by virtue of a higher game-point total of 22. Tagaytay A had 21, while AFP-A collected 20.5.

In the crossover semifinals going on at presstime, Tagaytay B was holding AFP-A, while SOA-Cabiznas was tackling Tagaytay A. The winners will then clash for the title of the P500,000 tournament.

Marlon Bernardino, contributor

WHIZ kid Wesley So delivers the crucial point for Tagaytay B.

Although its been said many times, many ways

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AYALA CINEMAS

WHAT'S INSIDE

Del Monte layoring — P15B seen to prop up agri, infra

BUSINESS

Editor Raul O. Marcelo
Assistant Editor Corrie S. Mariano

DOE to lead Malampaya oil project

Team working on bidding guidelines

By Abigail L. Ho

MALACAÑANG HAS DIRECTED THE DEPARTMENT OF Energy to lead the extraction and development of oil from the Camago-Malampaya oil and gas field.

Executive Order No. 473, signed on Nov. 30, tasked the DOE with preparing the immediate exploration, development and production of crude oil from the Malampaya oilfield.

The DOE, through Philippine Nacional Oil Co., will find discussions on the definition of terms of service for the project.

The EO said the DOE and PNOC could consult members of the Malampaya deep water gas to power project consortium, "with the end in view of optimizing the joint operations of the contract stakeholders in the production of natural gas and crude or black oil from the Camago-Malampaya reservoir."

PNOC could also tap third parties as participants in the project. The prospective partners, however, should abide by the yet-to-be-drafted terms of investors for the project.

A team, composed of representatives from the consortium and the DOE, is now working on guidelines for the bidding of the oil-to-development project.

Malampaya consortium members Shell Philippines Exploration BV (Shell) and Chevron Texaco Malampaya LLC had relinquished their right to the Malampaya oil-to-sell to other buyers down the project remains totally viable.

Considering that the oil is too expensive to yield only around 25 million barrels of oil, the P700 million to P900 million needed to extract and develop it was hardly worth the risk, consortium representatives said upon request for external affairs Ricardo Romulo said.

He said he has since the oil was discovered from the Malampaya gas, including the oil couple plant at Ilijan the Malampaya gas reserves. Under current production, the field supplies natural gas to three power plants with a total capacity of 2,700 megawatts.

Based on these, consortium members gave up last September their rights to the oil site, subject to conditions that would protect their investments in the gas find.

The Malampaya joint venture partners offered to cooperate with the DOE and the third parties who articulate the oil site, subject to conditions that will safeguard the integrity of the natural gas reservoir and the existing

Peso nears 2-1/2-yr high

THE PESO EDGED TOWARD A TWO-AND-A-half-year high yesterday on strong corporate local revenue seekers before the Christmas holidays.

The peso rose to as high as 53.10 to $1, closing at an all-last week's two-and-a-half year high of around 53.16. The currency is Asia's best performer this year, having gained 5.4 percent since the start of January.

"The remittances started to kick in again," said a currency dealer. He said the central bank had not intervened in the currency market to prevent steps to stem the peso's gain.

The currency has been helped by record remittances from an estimated eight million Filipinos working abroad and from an expansion in the country's fiscal balance thanks to an expanded sales tax imposed this year.

The government expects remittances to hit a record $10 billion this year.

TOYOTA

Del Monte layering

IF YOU HAD A DIFFICULT TIME DIGESTING how new Del Monte Pacific overlord Jose "Pepe" Campos Jr. has layered his acquisition of the Singapore-listed food and juice company, we have news for you.

He and his partner San Miguel Corp. have layered it some more.

Manhattan Pacific Ltd.—the joint venture of Campos, San Miguel and Shinsho equivalent Ang Tiu Tat ("Alex" to friends)...has undergone "corporate restructuring" even before the British Virgin Islands-incorporated vehicle could formally assume control of Del Monte Pacific.

Manhattan Pacific is now 100-percent owned by Manhattan San Miguel Holdings, which in turn is 42.2-percent owned by San Miguel Foods Asia Ltd. and 57.78 percent by SuperVote Inc., another British Virgin Islands post office box company.

San Miguel Foods Asia Ltd. is, in turn, 100-percent owned by San Miguel Holdings Ltd., which in turn is wholly-owned by San Miguel International, a 100-percent subsidiary of San Miguel Corp.

If San Miguel, Campos and even the Lucios continue to be right-lipped about how they snatched the deal from the Hon Pacific Group, it is because the so-called quiet period imposed by the Singapore Stock Exchange is still underway.

In any case, here are the earmarks of the buy backroom buzz: who packaged and fabricated what could easily be the merger-and-acquisition deal of the year:

- Reynaldo David, president of the Development Bank of the Philippines;
- Eduardo Francisco, Banco de Oro chief of corporate and investment banking department;
- Rafael Lansang Jr. and Diana Prieto, both of The Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corp.; and
- Joy Bargoza, corporate lawyer-wife of Finance Undersecretary Gabriel "Jay" Singson Jr., who used to work with the Lucios in Macondray, was quick to clarify that he and his wife maintain a Chinese wall in regard to each other's business and official functions.

According to the grapevine, UBP and BDO, on account of their long-standing relationships with Del Monte, stepped in to provide financing to the Campos drive just "two weeks to deadline."

Realizing that the deal was too big to finance by themselves, the two banks and Campos brought in HSBC as yard as to provide advice on the overall acquisition financing strategy.

Apparently, it was HSBC that in turn brought in San Miguel.

CONTINUED ON B4

COCKTAILS

Victor C. Agustin

Disney VISA

Enjoy the Magic of Hong Kong Disneyland with Visa

All Philippine-issued Visa and Visa Electron cardholders who make purchases using their Visa cards from now to 26 January 2002 can enter the Enjoy the Magic of Hong Kong Disneyland lucky draw, which entitles seven winning families of four on a package trip to the Hong Kong Disneyland. Visa International has entered into a global alliance with Disney as it continues to bring exciting programs that will make payment more fun and rewarding. This alliance has been extended to include Hong Kong Disneyland, which made Visa the official card of the Hong Kong theme park.

To celebrate this alliance, Visa has launched a special promotion that enables lucky cardholders to visit the Disney theme park for free. From now to 24 January 2002, a total of seven weekly draws will be held to give away one family of four Package Trip to Hong Kong Disneyland per draw. VISA Debit, Classic, Gold, Platinum, and pre-paid cardholders can register for the promotions via SMS, the internet, or call centers (Metro Manila - 637-2780; Provincial - Toll Free # 1800-1888-2091).

The seven lucky families of four will enjoy an extraordinary family vacation at Hong Kong Disneyland. At the park, the families can enjoy a cruise down the exotic Jungle River, a fun ride on Space Mountain, and going on adventures with Winnie the Pooh. The package comes complete with free airfare, a two-night stay at the Hong Kong Disneyland Hotel, and a chance to experience Character Breakfast at the hotel, eight fast passes that reduce waiting time for popular attractions, and HK$5,000 pocket money. With these package inclusions, the lucky winners will indeed experience a vacation filled with excitement and marvel for free!

Visa International Country Manager for the Philippines James Dixon said, "As the world's leading payment brand that provides convenient, secure, and rewarding ways to pay or be paid, Visa continues to enable as many people as possible to experience the benefits of card payment in the Philippine market. We want our Filipino cardholders to have the opportunity to experience the Disney magic. A trip to Hong Kong Disneyland creates a lifetime of memories that the whole family, especially the children, will never forget."

Information about this lucky draw can be found in print advertisements, statement inserts, posters, tent cards, danglers, flyers, and other promotional materials.

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UCPB

PLDT tops Asiamoney poll

PHILIPPINE LONG DISTANCE Telephone Co. has been chosen as the best-managed company in the Philippines by investors and analysts for the third straight year in a survey conducted by Asiamoney.

"The winners are corporations that stood out across all industry sectors for their accomplishments in 2000. They all demonstrated an impressive combination of financial and business performance, management strength and vision, in addition to displaying a strong commitment to shareholder value, sponsored efficiency and corporate governance principles," said Asiamoney in a statement.

Asiamoney, an influential financial magazine, conducts a yearly survey among mega-funds, hedge funds and brokerages worldwide to find out the best-managed companies in Asia.

PLDT president and CEO Napoleon L. Nazareno said the third-in-a row win for PLDT validated the soundness of the company's strategy and its efforts in the implementation of plans to achieve its corporate endeavors.

Stocks close higher

From page B1

...of banking Christmas weekend, dealers said.

They said the market would likely move sideways in today's session before staging a comeback after the Christmas break.The Philippine Stock Exchange composite index added 3.53 points to 1,058.98, it traded between 1,052.89 and 1,064.35.

Volume reached 146.47 million shares worth P638.94 million.

The broader all-shares index advanced 2.99 points to 1,262.73, turnover surpassed losers 26 to 22, while 47 stocks were unchanged.

Financial markets will be closed on Dec. 26 for a public holiday.

AFP

Peso . . .

From page B1

The peso also got a boost from the country's high-yielding bonds, which have attracted foreign investors.

Philippine bonds offer the highest interest rates in Asia after Indonesian bonds.

However, dealers said the peso was unlikely to hit the psychologically important 53-per-dollar mark this year because of strong demand for dollars from local importers and companies for repaying overseas debt.

"Besides, the market is still short in dollars. So there may be a bout of short covering by the end of the year," a Manila dealer said.

IDEAglobal said in a report that many investors had expected the peso to weaken by the yearend as remittances ebbed and because of overseas debt repayments in the new year.

"The price action has belied the market's expectation of peso weakness into the yearend," the research house said. *Reuters*

DOE . . .

From page B1

development.

Roco added: "If properly attended to, with the right mitigating technical solutions, (the oil extraction) can be done with little risk. But one of our conditions would be that if anything happens that threatens the gas project, (the third-party oil rim developer) will have to stop."

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BUSINESS Friday

Business Sections Editor Margie Quiroga-Espino

Cannes winnings or brand building?

By Mitzuang Ordoñez
Chair; Patricia Abarda
Contributor

THERE ARE TWO SCHOOLS of thought in the creative department of ad agencies today: the Cannes chasers and the brand builders.

The former is the genre of out-of-the-box creatives, whose adherents, mainly the new young generation of ad writers, aspire to win awards in the most famous hall of them all, the Cannes Festival, the Oscar of advertising.

Brand builders are more traditional.

They are driven by sales and market performance, at least 25 years of experience in advertising doing brand building. They work in partnership with manufacturing companies applying the marketing/theory requirements of marketing and communications strategy.

Winning awards is immaterial to them. Awareness of brand messages and market gains are.

Both schools worship the gods of creativity. But their antennae and outlook differ in creating advertising.

Cannes wannabes

Cannes "wannabes" are businessand-sale breakers, obsessed with execution. Their paranoia: that the advertising will manage to deliver a brand message regardless of whether the creative execution is irrelevant or irrational, strategic or general.

This selling job we'll be done by the discriminations of the advertising rather than the distinctiveness of the brand benefit. The assumption is if the advertising is distinct, the brand will be distinct.

Another presumption is that the consumers' benefit is what the consumer perceives it to be and that the ad is a mere play for emotion.

Think out-of-the-box. Intrusive. Interruptive. These buzzwords are the big criteria in creating ads intended for Cannes.

Brand builders

Brand builders think more externally in creating ad campaigns. They try to reinforce the efficiency and effectivity of their ads with consumer tests on both the product and its communication executions before launching the campaign.

The marketing departments and ad agency team have a historical knowledge of the brand's progress to help them adopt the best practices and avoid mistakes of the past.

Brand builders see long-term planners not peripatetic job hoppers or bounty hunters. They are quite veterans and master a body of work necessary for brand building.

They attach great value on brand equity as a long- term positioning but constantly enhancing competitiveness through product improvement and the updating of variants to generate trial and new usages.

Examples of long-term brand equities are Safeguard's superior protection and Colgate's Cavity and Tartar protection.

Both brands have been dominant market leaders for many decades; Colgate since the 1950s and Safeguard since the 1990s. Other examples are Jollibee's Langhap Sarap since the 1980s and Nestlé's Lemon, maintaining status.

Few actual demos

Cannes fatal flaw: very few actual demo users. Most Cannes creations are either banal or regional award winners but rarely represent mainstream producers in the huge Philippine mass market. They are usually done for small or medium- advertisers with no-real-equity or aim to win sales.

Still others are tactical ads whose messages are short-term flashes in the pan and are not part of a long-term strategy. Although they claim high attention, their results is in the blanket are fleeting and short-lived.

As soon as the ad is withdrawn, consumer demand is also withdrawn, demonstrating the quick wear-out and easy cast-off of interruptive ad executions.

What creative writers of the Cannes persuasion hit "the jackpot in the marketplace, they are called geniuses, if they bomb out, it's plain stupidity.

Challenges

Several market dynamics are challenging the new generation of creatives to pursue the Cannes route. Among them are the death blow advertising clutter, the evolving sophistication in consumer aesthetics and visual literacy, the boldness of consumerism due to the quick birth and death of a myriad new products.

The age of discontinuity predicted by Peter Drucker in the early 60s is here. So is the age of short attention span.

While Cannes chasers take the big leap of faith (you can't process rule-breaking ideas) brand builders enjoy the best of both worlds, since their brands are household names such as Nike, or Yale, or Johnson's Baby Powder, brands that have been built and matured for decades.

Any innovation in product formula and creativity in advertising is an enhancement, not (I hope) a derailment. You never dislocate the brand's axis. Remember the debacle when Coke changed its formula in the 70s?

Cannes chasers have the upper hand in the initiative aspect of advertising. They are users of vast, out-figures of speech; hyperbole, etc. fantasy, comedy, lampoon, irony and double speak.

In print they are minimalist, obsessing on black, relying on one ale, an art director's medium to convey or symbolize messages.

Both Cannes chasers and brand builders recognize that one of the most powerful "sounds of brand image and message is yes, yes-yes-yes.

Cultivate consent is an excellent element to affirm the brand's affinities connectivity with the sociology of its consumers. It also reflects the corporate personality and philosophy of the advertiser manufacturers.

The last Ad Congress theme "Ready for the world?" seems to reflect an inferiority complex. Why do we ask? Because we don't have Cannes trophies like Thailand's (4+1) 5, Pinoys are ready? Because most of our ads are passive and not completely palpable to foreigners?

On the other hand, brand builders bask in superiority complex. The Philippines has a galaxy of successful brands built through planned campaigns over the years. San Miguel Beer, Milo, Rexona, Nido, Lucky Me, Del Monte, OFC Catsup, Facebook Bar-Soap, Magnolia Chicken, Jack & Jill Snacks, Hope, Goodies, Marian, Interim, Beach and Gardenia.

Marketing today is constantly facing the challenges of relentless changes in technology, globalized economy, lifestyles and the homogenization of tastes and needs.

Today "proprietary" properties are available to any businessmen, information technology empowers consumers, retail chains would store power from malls to purchases to point of purchase, pricing is the biggest determinant in consumer purchase.

The question that advertising people incessantly ask is, "Will the brand still be important in the years to come?" What new role will the manufacturers of products take? After the unbundling, will the ad agencies be extinct?

Only one thing seems certain: The altar of creativity will always be lighted, and the creators of "Cannes winnings" will always be around spending new battered ads.

Can Cannes chasers be brand builders? Yes, of course. They know the rules. But clients must legislate.

Can brand builders be Cannes chasers? Difficult. It's not their cup of tea, and they are not daredevils.

(The author is chair of Publicis Manila; Andibuit at Mitzuang Ordonez@publicis-manila.com.)

A YMP to Ocean Harbour is one of the rewards Areas offers its clients.

Credit cards use rewards to keep clients

AS THE COMPETITION AMONG credit card companies heats up, the rewards they are offering to clients are sizzling up. Those unique gifts worth millions—which are the most preferred by clients—to electronics, appliances, and the ever popular 50 million which can be redeemed for air tickets.

As such, members get used to the idea of collecting gifts simply by using their credit cards, card companies are challenged to use its distinctness in showing appreciation to its clients.

Perry Pernosa-Serrano, card marketing head of American Express Bank Philippines, discloses "It is not enough to offer a unique of the cheapest items and services you can provide. What you offer must also be perceived as special by the consuming buyer-consumer."

For American Express' prepaid/non card members, those to double dosing vouchers at highly rated restaurants, aromatherapy massages, luggage and gift shops, pleasure boats established and exported brands—and even Hawaiian hotels and—from this...the many amenities of Hawaiian-based excitement towns to Waikiki's sizzling beaches, where one can explore the depths of the underwater world and marvel at the colorful marine fauna at the Sea Life Aquarium. "You've got to know your clientele. This means knowing their dreams and aspirations—which are what the Platinum and cardmember world experiences are all about," she said.

But whether one is targeting American Express' upscale prepaid/non market or to a wide audience, travel remains the biggest attraction, according to Grace D. Limpin, American Express card acquisition head. All major card companies offer travel reward programs but can be exchanged for air miles, which can then be used to redeem air tickets to popular destinations.

But American Express has moved significantly ahead in the past few months by offering its clients way to earn air miles, that is, one mile for every P22.50 instead of P45 until the end of the year. Moreover, it has partnered with six frequent flyer programs which have its upgrades to Singapore Airlines. Other cards will require P20 to P50 to earn one air mile and are limited to one or tied up with only three programs at most.

In just a few months, the airlines have partnered and more to have converted as much as over four million membership rewards points to air miles. To distinguish itself from other card companies, American Express designed its rewards program to be as simple as "you don't require for as long as a card member continues to maintain his good standing. "This means more opportunities for members to redeem tickets and travel," Limpin emphasized.

Card members have also redeemed 45 million membership rewards points and enjoyed a total of P20 million in hotel discount privileges which is another factor of the card. In addition, card members have used their American Express post platinum cards to enjoy complimentary access to the Mactan Lounge at the Mactan Cebu International Airport. The card is not only a convenience, but most especially useful to Filipino-American card members who are frequent flyers.

"Experienced travel counselors and personal assistance who can make hotel and restaurant bookings are also at card members' beck and call 24/7 by phone in eight countries in the Asia Pacific," she said. The travel assistance can sometimes mend plans with flight schedules and provide visa requirements.

Filipinos buy more bath fixtures

ALTHOUGH 5 MILLION OF FILIPINOS remain without toilet bowls in their houses, the country has become a major importer of bathroom fixtures in 20 countries.

Taiwanese owned Hinhong Philippine Corp. at BCD claims it is now the number manufacturer of ceramics products in the Philippines.

The booming shutdowns in the local economy has not affected local demand of their bathroom fixtures as first nine month sales went up by 6.4 percent to P975.19 million for January to October this year from P911.29 million from the same period last year.

The increase in local demand may be traced to HCC's expansion of sanitary to 500 sanitaryware and increased its production to 1.5 million pieces a year. This led to a high-er market share to 40 percent. HCC anticipated a $3.5 million expansion the next two years.

HCC which employs over 1,000 in the Philippines and over 100,000 worldwide, also went on heavy promotion during the first half of the year, to increase sales. Its items inspired Filipinos to add more bathroom designs appealed to a fast growing market.

"We replaced bulky designed fixtures with minimalist designed, more flexible and stylish ones that are more practical but also maintain exceptional functions," said HCC's assistant vice president-corporate planning, Ma. Victoria Lim.

However, exports slumped down by 34 percent to P959 million during the first three quarters of this year from the P427 million reports during the same period last year.

HCC marketing assistant for Marketing Services, Florence Reyleen, says there is a big domestic market for bathroom fixtures. However there is also good report potential and HCC is expanding the market abroad. Today it sells to Taiwan, Malaysia, Korea, Indonesia, USA, Vietnam, Riyadh, KSA, Qatar, Cambodia, Singapore, China, Hawaii.

Recognizing the big dearth of toilets in homes, Florence says they regularly donate water closets and toilet bowls to the rural areas especially to public schools.

HCC's production plant is at a 19-hectare property in the First Cavite Industrial Estate set up in 1995 at a cost of $45 million. It has plans in Taiwan, China and the Philippines. Margie Q. Espino

HICHENG Philippines Corp. employs about 1,000 Filipinos in its plant at the First Cavite Industrial Estate.

HSBC ties up with Tagaytay Highlands

HSBC RECENTLY INKED A PACT WITH Tagaytay Highlands where Highlands' cardholders can play golf at the International Golf Club. The Country Club at Tagaytay Highlands and Tagaytay Midlands Golf Club will get the following perks: for Prestiging Privilege Silver Visa cardholders—Upon enrollment in the auto-charge arrangement, members can avail of 50% discount monthly dues and expenses for guest-invited four-ballers.

This will make payment of club dues and expenses easier for members plus, they get the chance to fly via PAL for free. As an added bonus, each charged dues and expenses will earn double the miles until March 2006.

For new applicants—they will get all of the above plus a 2-year waiver on annual fee—the annual mileage fee for Visa Gold and Mastercard Gold, and a 1-year waiver on annual fee for waiver for Rizalista Jollee Visa Gold).

The program will be introduced to members in January 2006. Tagaytay Highlands continues to forge premium alliances for its valued members.

Present during the signing were Chito Sta Tomas (SVP and head of cards, HSBC), Wilson Manning (CEO, HSBC), Willy N. Ocier (vice chairman, Tagaytay Highlands), Jerry C. Ho (president, Tagaytay Highlands) and Mark Gerard Ocier (general manager, Tagaytay Highlands).

Brandy to beef up marketing in 2006

FUNDADOR BRANDY IS AIMING FOR A bigger market share in the Philippines by bringing the brand closer to the market.

Fundador will have an extensive campaign to highlight the fact that the brand is the No. 1 Spanish brandy. A lot of media and promotional activities will be implemented next year to further strengthen this fact.

Additionally, 2006 will mark renewed aggression of Fundador's distribution network by adding more outlets and dedicated to selling only that Fundador is found in every shelf in the Philippines.

Fundador is now being marketed locally by Mantrade, the global spirits distribution and sales company. Mantrade is also the company behind Bacardi Rum, Bombay Sapphire, Macallan Single Malt Whisky and Remy Martin Cognac.

Vince Santos, marketing director for Mantrade Philippines, says the global spirits distributor has a good track record as far as marketing, promoting and establishing brands is concerned.

"Mantrade has proven to grow brands in markets where it is present. With the expertise and passion of Mantrade, we are confident that the brand will continue to grow in the market," Santos said.

"We are a major player in the global spirits market and aim to achieve a top three position in the most important markets around. In the Philippines, we are No. 1. Our vast series, size reflect our key goals which are delivering ongoing growth in the spirits we represent, and continuously increasing the economic value of our company," Santos added.

Mantrade, a wholly owned by Highland Distillers, V&S Vin & Spirit AB, Remy Cointreau, and Jim Beam Brands Worldwide Inc.

Santos also said that the Philippines represents an exciting market for Mantrade. The distribution conglomerate is creating Mantrade Philippines in response to the growth potential of the market.

At the moment, Mantrade's brands are doing very well in the country. Fundador and Absolut has been active with its promotions and press activities while Remy Martin has been in the forefront of a campaign to make cognac contemporary. "We see Remy Martin to continue being the favorite cocktail base," Santos said.

On the other hand, Jim Beam Bourbon has been well received in bars where it is being promoted. "Jim Beam entered with cola is really suited to the Filipino palette. We have received positive responses from those who have tried it. In fact, a lot have shifted to it. Our very easy to mix drink, Mixmaster, Jim Beam is affordable for Filipinos," Santos added.

The Mantrade executive also disclosed that all Mantrade brands will be heavily promoted in the coming year.

"We will make all our brands more accessible and relevant to its respective consumers. Fundador in particular will have a greater presence in the provinces. We will bring our products closer to its market. Consumers will find out that our brands are more superior as compared to others."

"We will make all our brands more accessible and relevant to its respective consumers. Fundador in particular will have a greater presence in the provinces. We will bring our products closer to its market. Consumers will find out that our brands are more superior as compared to others."

₱15B seen to prop up agri, infra

By Norman W. Dominguez

THE GOVERNMENT WANTS TO SPEND SOME P35 billion out of the P55 billion it "saved" this year to pump prime the economy in the first quarter.

Trade Secretary Peter B. Favila yesterday said that the money would go to basic social services, particularly projects related to infrastructure, health and agriculture.

"The Cabinet committee are looking at ... labor and irrigation projects, which could provide jobs at least for the duration of these projects," he said.

According to the trade chief, the government is expected to go over its budget by P180 billion this year but the Department of Budget and Management and the National Economic and Development Authority reported that it only spent about P140 billion beyond its resources.

Favila said that based on preliminary discussions in the Cabinet, only part of the so-called "multi-agency fund" was expected to be spent in the next quarter since spending all of it would mean overshooting the expenditure ceiling for 2006.

The decision to spend the "savings" was reached in last Tuesday's Cabinet meeting.

Earlier, President Macapagal-Arroyo ordered that this excess amount be spent within three months.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita was quoted as saying that the unused funds would be allotted to at least five priority areas—food, health, housing, infrastructure and education.

Favila said the Cabinet was still working on the details on where the money would go.

"This is actually a nice problem, how to spend money," he said. "I foresee a good start for the country next year."

Cocktales

Peter Lagdameo

operationally-fun Miguel'pawikan Ramon Ang, after Campos' initial partner, Sumitomo Fruits, dropped out of the equation about a week ago, according to one account, before D-day.

According to the pro-Campos grapevine, Campos himself tapped former Secretary (land president and Mirova financial adviser Rolando Zapata, now based in Hong Kong, for additional advice.

Flavor of the month

It looks like the power-related headaches of the Lopezes have again spilled over to the judiciary and their No.1b Lucio Tan previously.

The Supreme Court has just asked the Lopez-controlled toll-way operator, Manila North Tollways Corp., and the government to comment on the case filed by Supreme Secretary Irene Marcos, Rolando Zubiaga, Luis Arroyo, Emmanuel Joel Villanueva, Erico Basilio Abinsay, Renato Magtubo, Rodolfo Plaza and Antonio Deoquito.

The complainants and three related NGOs have asked the high court to nullify what they say was the Ramos government's "Pharaonic" award to the Lopezes of the rehabilitation, operation and extension of the toll road.

Chavez chatter shotgunned

The "facts" of Francisco Chavez have been disputed yet again, this time by Deputy Ombudsman for Luzon Victor Fernandez.

Fernandez wrote to say that Chavez was "gravely mistaken" when the latter claimed, in an item published in the Dec. 6 Cocktales column, that the Ombudsman has been manipulating against GMA adviser Roberto R. Romulo was a "mouthpiece" decision of outgoing Ombudsman Simeon Marcelo.

Fernandez even attached both copies of the decision, signed Nov. 16 by justices Leonardo Quiñe Jasmo, expressed by acting director Edwin Agbada, recommended by Assistant Ombudsman Pelagio Apostol, before they were finally approved by Fernandez on Nov. 25.

The Ombudsman even gave the former action granted a self-other reason on grounds of equity procedures, stating it should be the Office of the President, not the Ombudsman, that Chavez should ask for a copy of Romulo's statement of assets and liabilities.

Heard through the grapevine

INP president Jose Michael Cuño, who has lately been publicly protesting against the quality of governance of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, has himself been found wanting by-to-lose than the Supreme Court.

Head Justice Conchita Carpio Morales' ponencia in R. 55644 dated Dec. 14, 2001 and you will have a difference perspective on Cuño. Save lawyer Rogelio Vinluan and their fellow board members in the Integrated Bar of the Philippines. (Email: cocktales_pdi@inbox.net or cocktales_pdi@yahoo.com)

Projects worth ₱500M get tax perks

THE BOARD OF INVESTments approved last week tax perks for three projects worth P500.8 million through its one-day approval process.

Trade Undersecretary Elmer C. Hernandez and four Investments, with a combined worth P37.5 billion, have been approved under the simplified registration procedure.

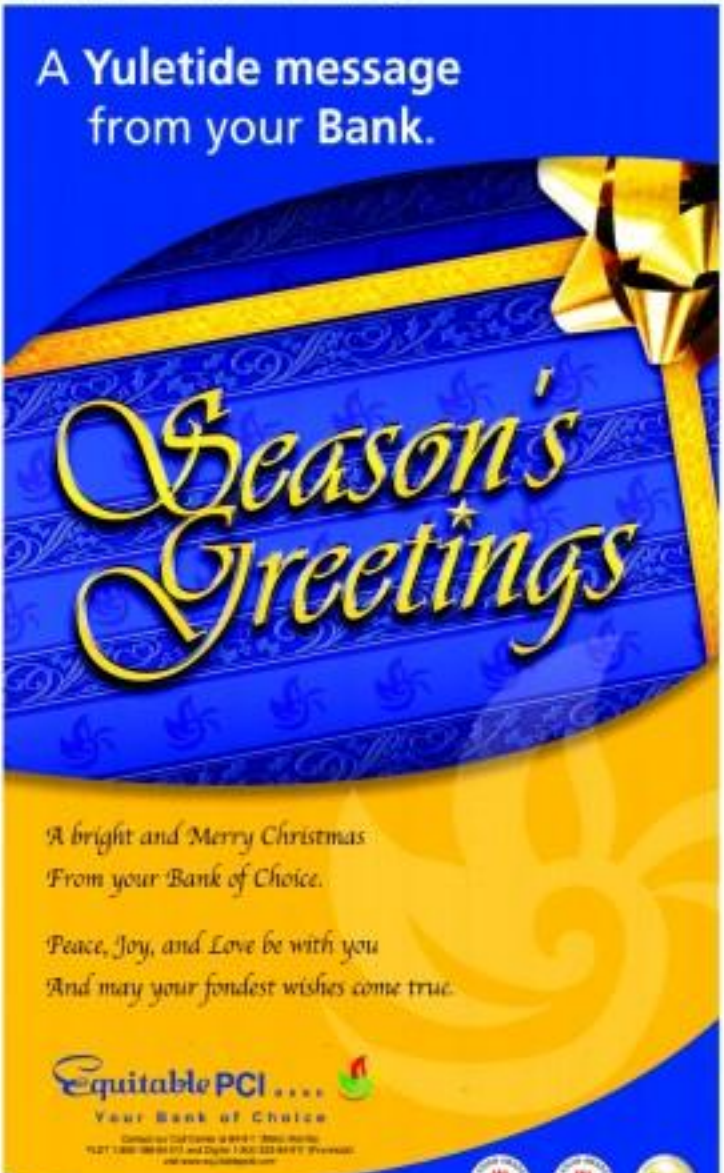
AG Filipino Iron Philippine Agriculture Land Development and MEI (HLM) Inc. was qualified for a tax holiday and other incentives for its P481.75-million venture in Cainta, Rizal.

International Yang Ming Industrial Co. Inc. proposed to lay out some P37.5 million in a garments factory in Imugan, Bulacan.

Gladstar Transportation Inc. plans to invest P1.6 million in a medical transportation operation in Quezon City.

The three projects were given six-year income exemption, which qualified them for a four-year tax holiday plus other fiscal and non-fiscal perks.

Once fully operational, the projects are expected to create a total of 425 new direct jobs. — Konrad M. Dominguez



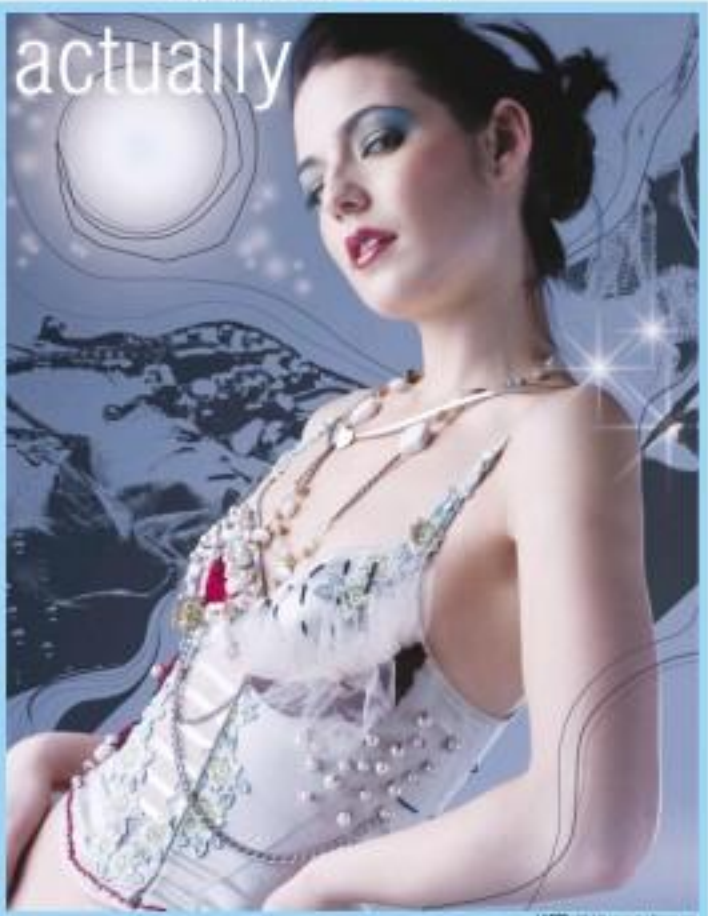
LIFESTYLE

Contributing editors:
Jenni Esperas
and Apples Marin-Sathaani

Inter Desk Head Pennies

FASHION

Love, actually



LACED with bittersweet adornments

I Love You makes vintage fashion high art

By Cherie V. Mund

PRESS THE BUTTON TO your left once and wait a sec to be buzzed in, the scribbled instruction says. In exchange, the shop's three-word name is scrawled right above it: I Love You.

In a not-so-fast moment of idiocy and impatience, I press the button three (if some) times. Annoyed, I suspect, though she doesn't show it, I enter upon the door. She beckons me to the basement.

From its step-covered level rimmed girl's bedroom setup in San Antonio Village in Makati, the I Love You story, two months ago, has moved down (only literally) to the basement of a small, metamorphic building in a busier section of town.

Pilar Pinto is a quaint little building on the far end of Makati Avenue near JP Rizal Street. It's located next door to a small hotel and right across a construction site. A non-shop-going mall, mutters Sharon Ardin, one of I Love You's owners, the eyes light up, a new mall opening right across can only mean better business for I Love You. It is this who opened the first signs on the old site of a popular bar. "I've always liked this place," she smiles decisively.

For the uninitiated, it's hard to predict what's behind the postcard white door and bright pink framed frosted bay window.

Endearing

I Love You.

No other phrase, perhaps, is as feeling-ed and overused as the one made up by these three words. At the safest, it's banal, prosaic, even clumsy. Now here's a shop named after it. As if consumers don't already see enough mediocre stuff at the big shops!

"We just wanted [the store's name] to be as endearing as possible," Sharon says with a laugh.

For a little over a year now, Sharon and partners Corinne Ching and Mitzi Suzara have modified a somewhat three years-ago-ness of wounded vintage fashions into a full lifestyle shop selling a motley of stuff from 70 consignors... no way like the kind you see in mainstream shops, not at all.

"Love plying here is for sale," says Corinne, as she shows me around the shop. The basement says is still a modest affair, but it has matured to enough, she explains. The shoe-dotty girl on Gaija Street (the shop's old home) has apparently grown up—there's a refined, if casual, order to her eclectic mess.

The walls are painted pristine white, from the retailing staircase to the low that has been converted into a cashier's counter. The main door opens to a small receiving area dominated by two, slightly worn oversized antique wardrobes, each propped with a shoe-type three-pillow, framed drawings by artist Alex Ilarco's infant boy Avila. Shoes on the shelves is an assortment of used books, magazines, hand-made binders, an undated notebook covered with box tickets, postcards of old Ilarcos' photographs. A sculpted gold wire frames art in construction bolt illuminating the area.

Across the room are several racks of the store's one-of-a-kind apparel, created by Mitzi and her production team, others consigned by designers like Inno Torralba. On the floor, propped against the glass blocks wall, are a large, rather cumbersome lampshade, two framed artworks and a pair of white, round body pillows. There are also vintage pairs of footwear.

Platform

"We want the store to be a platform for young artists to make small things," explains Corinne. "That way we hope to elevate fashion into a fine art."

Of course, the owners understand that not everyone may have a taste for vintage, or avoided or not. They get their share of well-to-do crop-out shoppers hunting.

"So, like to say people who think they can't get away with any stuff that we have," Corinne says. What is why she and her partners set at ease to hand to guide clients in their choices. No drawings with clueless salespersons, thank you very much. The artist owners, well, can you up, and customers just how much amount of vintage you can take without giving you a fashion makeover session.

"We're giving you the courage to explore art, not just fashion," Sharon says. "Our [non-]rules are always on pause. Our cut stuff are actually made with their personal styles. It's not just the fashion on the outside, but also from within. This is our way of redefining fashion as you know it."

Apart from apparel and accessories—belts, eyewear, bags, jewelry (again by vintage or re-invented)—I Love You also offers haircut, makeup and nail makeover services, all done in the confines of the store. Many kinds the Golden Gate notebooks, tiny vials of Tiger Balm, embellishing-strip are among the unexpected merchandise. As any game, a client may find one or two of the store's designers at work, bathed by beads of light from the overhead spotlight at the center of the room.

"We keep importing clothes from China and Thailand," says Corinne. "This is our chance to let young designers know that if we create things, even little by little, who knows, maybe one day, other countries will be importing from us."

That's love, actually.

I Love You store is on the basement of Philippine Bank, Makati Avenue, Makati City. And close to Aberdeen Court and Greenbelt. But it's open 2.30 p.m. Sunday to Sunday, and 5 p.m. to 6 a.m. Friday and Saturday.

HAT trait

ALL-AROUND KIDS

From catwalk to caroling

Front page 1/2

a token at face value. No thrill. No meaning. No purpose.

The Professional Models Association of the Philippines (PMAP), a nonprofit organization run by models, is often taken at face value by people.

"Many people may not be fully aware of PMAP's outreach and recruiting activities," said Rizza Maranguit-Santos, PMAP president. "We have quietly been running hotels and helping the less fortunate in our own little way. This is something that has been done and continued through all generations of PMAP."

In the past years, according to Santos, the PMAP has organized an annual outreach program with the Tahanan Ng Lasa (a home for sexually abused girls), Habitat for Humanity, Jesus Loves the Little Children Foundation and Hospicio de San Jose.

"We also have participated in several fund-raising projects for the World Wildlife Fund of the Philippines and ticket-selling for Boy Scout Kasama," she added.

Every year, PMAP chooses a beneficiary with the help of Shaun Bermudez-Hicks's foundation called BFH (Everyday Is Your Birthday).

This year, the proceeds from the annual PMAP Christmas caroling will go to LIFE (Leukemic Indigent Fund Endowment). PMAP members this time will visit the children with leukemia at the St del Mundo Hospital in Quezon City. The money raised will go to clinic medication, bills and other necessities, Santos said.

PMAP member also donate blood.

The PMAP membership consists of veteran models who have modeled here and abroad. Florencia Bautista, Isabel Rivas, Faye Montenegro, Nicolette Bell, Remi Javier and Luke Jichain are but a few of the members of the PMAP.

Not too many people know that these models also contribute to charities. Not only are they runway and commercial models, they are also role models in leading a hand to charities. In course. They are superhuman in word and deed.

OH! CHRISTMAS TREE!

Give love... Compiled by Jenni Epperson

Superpinkmalu loathe the heat, and don't expect anything in return.
—**Raymond Gutierrez, TV host**
...not just on Christmas day.
—**Louie Cordero, painter**
...and give a little more.
—**Stephanie Zubiri, student**

...receive love, make love under the Christmas tree.
—**Cindy Burton, actress, MTV VJ**
...receive, share and express it, do anything as long as you love. Bravo!
—**Alex Escar, model, student**
...showcase and extension of I-rounded.
—**Arnee Barreto, Pineapple store owner**

From catwalks to caroling

Models raise money for leukemia victims this Christmas

By Bianca Valerio
Lifestyle Writer

SO THEY CALL US supermodels... But what does "super" really mean?

Can we carve in obviously high attrition and laugh in the face of extreme odds? Or can we only create chaos technique between wardrobe changes and yet